



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Lent 3 (A)

March 12, 2023

[RCL] Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42

Exodus 17:1-7

Here, in the wilderness, we find the Israelites just outside of Sinai, so near and still so far. However, the distance is made so long not because there is far to walk, but because their hearts have wandered once again back toward Egypt, even while their feet led them ever closer to that holy mountain. Notice in verses 5-6, God instructs Moses to “go on ahead of the people” taking some of the elders with him. Where do they go? To Horeb—a name often used for Sinai within scripture—where God has instructed Moses to act.

We might be inclined to think that it was a well that opened after Moses struck the rock at God’s command; but no, something more miraculous happened. Water poured forth from the rock and it ran past Moses, past the elders who were with him. It ran past them all, out of that place called Massah and Meribah. It flowed all the way back to Rephidim where the people sat waiting. It was there at Rephidim that the Israelites drank. It was there, drinking that water flowing from an unseen source, that they remembered the Lord was indeed among them.

- Where is your “Rephidim”? where do you find yourself stuck and thirsting?
- Often, we may find ourselves wondering, “Is the Lord among us or not,” and like the Israelites, the answer that God is with us may come from an unexpected place. From what unseen sources do you quench your spiritual thirst? From where is your water flowing?
- When was a time you went on ahead of your neighbors, like Moses, to calm their restless spirit? What happened?

Psalm 95

A familiar psalm, one in which the psalmist reminds us of who God is—of God’s magnificence and presence. The psalmist also invites us to participate in this reminder by joining in the recitation of Psalm 95: “Come let us sing to the Lord; let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.” From the very beginning, this psalm invites us into an act of worship, a posture of prayer. It is no wonder that it has so often been the start of our days in morning prayer.

The psalmist recalls Moses’ striking the rock because the people had forgotten God’s presence among them and lost their hope in God’s magnificence. Psalm 95 serves to help us remember and maintain that hope by declaring in songs and shouts the glorious things our God has done, so that in times of tribulation and jubilation, we might not forget our God.

- Where have you seen God at work in your life and the lives of those around you?
- How does your community help you to worship and pray? How do you help them to do the same?

Romans 5:1-11

Here, St. Paul shows a series of stages by which we understand the grace afforded us in Christ Jesus. In this collection of readings, St. Paul is not just reflecting on the experiences of the early Christians; he also is hearkening back to the experiences of Israel described in the Torah or Pentateuch—the first five books of the Bible.

Exodus 17:1 reminds us that the Israelites journey in stages as God commanded. Here, in Romans 5:1-5, St. Paul explains the stages by which we arrive to recognize the grace we have received and discover the hope we maintain that we might share in the Glory of God.

St. Paul writes that suffering produces endurance, which produces character, which produces hope, which does not disappoint. However, we should not take St. Paul's words as an encouragement to seek out suffering or worse to inflict suffering on our neighbors. Instead, we should read his words as a pastoral reminder that, though we may at times find ourselves in trouble and suffering, God is still there with us—even if we have brought trouble on ourselves.

- Reflect on your spiritual journey to this moment. It is full of stages; which stages stand out right now?
- St. Paul shows us how he and some people find hope even in suffering. Of course, suffering is not the only place where we might discover hope. Where do you find hope? Are there any surprising places or stages in which you found hope in God?

John 4:5-42

All the way back in Exodus, God stood before a rock and instructed Moses to strike it with his staff. Here once again, far more visible, God is before a rock where water may be drawn. This time, a woman stands perplexed before God who sits, tired by journeying, by Jacob's well.

“How can you ask a drink of me?” she asks. She was a Samaritan and he a Jew. Did she notice that he was tired? Tired though he may have been, he was full of life, and he promised her that same life: water that “will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” Eventually, she ponders aloud to him about the coming Messiah, and Jesus—our God—reveals to her that he is, in fact, the Messiah. This woman becomes the first evangelist; she runs back to the city, Sychar, and proclaims what she has seen and heard, and many come to believe.

She does not only tell them about Jesus, but she also invites them to come and perceive. Notice too, that even while proclaiming, she is still unsure: “He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” Even she is still growing by stages and thirsting for the living water.

- Think of a time in which someone unexpected aided you or asked for your help. What happened?
- The people of Sychar perceive Jesus because of the Samaritan woman. Who in your life has helped you to perceive Jesus?

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