

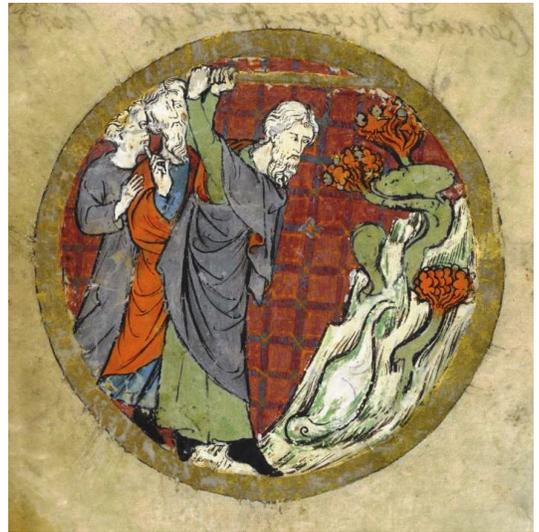
March 15, 2020

## SUNDAY MORNING PRAYER

### OPENING PRAYER

Holy and healing God,  
ever faithful to your promises,  
and ever close to your church –  
Be close to us now,  
your sons and your daughters,  
those whom you see,  
and hear,  
and have called by name.

Move among us,  
wherever we may be,  
and equip us for service in your world.  
Amen.



### SCRIPTURE

Exodus 17:1-7

*A Reading from the Old Testament, followed by a period of silent reflection.*

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?"

But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" So Moses cried out to the Lord, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me."

The Lord said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink."

Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

## REFLECTION

- Was there a word, an image or a phrase that stood out to you?
- Spend a few moments reflecting on that word, image, or phrase.
- What is God speaking to you personally through this scripture?

## A READING from "The Big Yes," a sermon by Walter Brueggemann

Our Old Testament story puts Israel in the wilderness between slavery and the land of promise. Israel has a rich and embarrassing memory of the wilderness, about how Israel conducted itself in a time of danger and deficit. The theme of wilderness is an appropriate one for Lent, for Lent is about being in thin places without resources and being driven back to the elemental reality of God, the reliability of God, and our capacity to trust God in the thin places where there are no other resources. The theme of wilderness—by way of Lent—is a useful one for us now. Indeed, the context of the U.S.—in our long season of fear, anxiety, and violence—is being driven back to wilderness questions about the reality of God, the reliability of God, and our capacity to trust God in the thin places where there are no other resources for life.

The scene is at Rephidim in the in the wilderness. Nobody knows where that was. It is simply a place with a lack. It was a dry, hot place, and they had no water. Imagine, no water, the most elemental requirement for life, the scarcest commodity in the wilderness, and they had none. They could not produce any for themselves. There were no wells. They had no adequate substitutes for water that could possibly sustain them. The focus is upon their deep need and upon the way in which the deepest question of faith is connected to the deepest material reality of life. (Likely you know that even now the scarcity of water is an acute one around the world, so that it is quipped, "The next great war will not be about *oil* but about *water*.") So they complained, thinking they were entitled to water. They argued with Moses, who was supposed to assure the water supply. Finally they must come face-to-face with God, because they have no alternative. That is what Lent is about, is it not? ... to come face-to-face with God in need because there is no alternative. Lent is not about guilt or even about repentance or giving up some convenient extra. It is rather about the raw, deepest need in our life.

What happens in this transaction is that the *water question* (material, concrete support for life) is turned into *the God Question* concerning the one who "leads beside still waters..." As a result they dared to ask the question, "Is the Lord among us or not?" The Bible does not everywhere assume that God is present, but knows about the dry places where God's absence is overwhelming. They asked *the God question* about *the water problem*, because they knew they were up against it in their need and had no alternative. The Israelites, in their quarrelsome challenge, articulated the song of Eliza Doolittle to Freddie in "My Fair Lady," "Don't talk of

love, show me!" "Don't talk or water, show me." Don't give me theological formulations, do something concrete. This is a demanding, quarrelsome engagement, but the Israelites in their anxiety were exceedingly practical. They did not want a God who would not deliver on the real stuff needed to make life possible.

And then quite tersely, God, with an assist from Moses, answers the anxiety of Israel:

Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink. (vv. 5-6)

God hears the cries of Israel. God answers decisively. God gives water. God gives the water of life. and when God gives water for life, Israel's deep question is answered: Yes: The Lord is among us! Yes, God has the capacity to transpose wilderness into an arena for life. Yes, God is reliable. Yes, God is faithful. Yes, God is an adequate source for life in a context of scarcity and anxiety. This is the "Big Yes" of God, the one about whom Paul writes:

As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been "Yes and No." For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaim among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not "Yes and No"; but in him it is always "Yes." For in him every one of God's promises is a "Yes." For this reason it is through him that we say the "Amen," to the glory of God. (2 Cor. 1:18-20)

"Always Yes!" Israel can remember not only that water was given by God, but remembers how it was given. Like blood from a turnip, like a purse from the ear of a sow, water from rock, food from hunger, life from death, joy from sorrow, Yes from No, well-being from anxiety. The story does not explain, any more than we explain Easter after Friday, well-being after Lent. And the reason we do not explain is that we are looking to God, the one who holds all circumstances and all emergencies, all possibilities and all needs and all gifts in God's own hand, the one who says "yes." The story is about God's inexplicable capacity to do well-being in a world that has been shut down. Yes even in wilderness, yes in Lent, yes from rock, yes to thirst. Yes to us, yes to the world, the story is about being dazzled beyond every explanation, Yes, Yes, Yes!

## **PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

May we who are merely inconvenienced  
Remember those whose lives are at stake.  
May we who have no risk factors  
Remember those most vulnerable.

May we who have the luxury of working from home  
Remember those who must choose between preserving their health  
or making the rent.  
May we who have the flexibility to care for our children when their schools close  
Remember those who have no options.  
May we who have to cancel our trips  
Remember those that have no safe place to go.  
May we who are losing our margin money in the tumult of the economic market  
Remember those who have no margin at all.  
May we who settle in for a quarantine at home  
Remember those who have no home.  
As fear grips our country,  
Let us choose love.  
During this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms around each other,  
Let us yet find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbors.  
Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## CHARGE

God: Go now, to find the thirsty.

**People: I/we will show them where the living water flows.**

God: Go now, to find the hungry.

**People: I/we will share from our abundance to feed them.**

God: Go now, to find the stranger.

**People: I/we will embrace them as sister and brother.<sup>2</sup>**

## BLESSING

May the grace of Christ, which daily renews us,  
and the love of God, which enables us to love all,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, which unites us in one body,  
make us eager to obey the will of God until we meet again,  
through Jesus Christ, our Lord.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> @Cameron Wiggins Bellm, March 2020.

<sup>2</sup> adapted from Thom M. Shuman, (<http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com/search?q=Matthew+14>)

<sup>3</sup> *The Worship Sourcebook*, 362.