

3rd Sunday in Lent

Year A

Colour purple

Exodus 17.1-7

Water from the Rock

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 quarrelled 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 quarrelled and tested the LORD, saying, 'Is the LORD among us or not?'

What's going on?

The themes today are about how God saves people, both physically and spiritually and centres upon the image of water. In this first passage, we hear how the people of Israel were journeying in the desert when they began to suffer from lack of water. The people blamed Moses, their leader, arguing that if this journey in the wilderness were really what God wanted for his people, then they would not be dying from thirst and dehydration. The people equated God being with them as provision for their physical and well as spiritual wellbeing and felt that the provision of water would be a test of God's promise to the people. God responds by telling Moses where to get water for the people. [Note that as we are in

Lent, this contrasts with the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness when he was thirsty, when he decides that he will trust in God and *not* put God to the test].

Psalm 95

A Call to Worship and Obedience

**O come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
For the LORD is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.
In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.
The sea is his, for he made it,
and the dry land, which his hands have formed.**

**O come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!
For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.**

**O that today you would listen to his voice!
Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,
when your ancestors tested me,
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.
For forty years I loathed that generation
and said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray,
and they do not regard my ways.'
Therefore in my anger I swore,
'They shall not enter my rest.'**

What's going on?

This psalm relates directly to the previous passage. It reminds people to trust God and to worship him. The psalmist tells us to listen to God telling us not to be like the people of Israel trying to test God's faithfulness but to remember that God is the creator of all and will make provision for us. [Perhaps Jesus remembered the words of this psalm when he was tested in the wilderness].

Romans 5. 1-11

Results of Justification

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

What's going on?

St Paul here tells us more about salvation through Jesus, God's Son. St Paul explains it to us in terms of enemies making peace and being reconciled. Sin keeps us away from God (makes us 'enemies') so we can't be at peace with God or reconciled to God while we exist as human beings in a sinful state. This problem is removed by Jesus' death, getting rid of the barrier sin creates between human beings and God and making it possible for us to be 'at peace' and 'reconciled' to God through faith in Jesus as God's Son. So even if we are having a difficult time, or suffering,

we can be sure that through our faith we can be saved. If we believe in Jesus as God's Son, then we have no need any more to try and test God's love for us.

John 4.5-42

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!' The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is

called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you want?' or, 'Why are you speaking with her?' Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, eat something.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' So the disciples said to one another, 'Surely no one has brought him something to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, "Four months more, then comes the harvest"? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps." I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.'

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.'

What's going on?

This important passage in St John's gospel tells about a discussion Jesus had with a woman from Samaria at a well where the people came to get their water. The passage has some unusual features. First, it would have been astonishing in Jesus' time for a man to have an extended conversation of this kind with a woman. Further, Jesus was a Jew and the woman was a Samaritan. Jews and Samaritans hated each other, so from the point of view of an outsider, Jesus would have been spending his time with an enemy who was also a nobody and beneath his dignity. His own disciples were shocked by it. The fact that Jesus has a long and

complex conversation with such a person about the nature of salvation is even more amazing.

Yet this conversation about the nature of salvation stems from the simple human need that is behind the first passages. A thirsty person is in need of water and Jesus is sitting beside Jacob's well, a reminder of God's provision for his people from ancient times. The Samaritan woman is amazed that Jesus asks her for water, because these enemies do not share, but Jesus then goes on to talk about what else human beings need, which is relationship with, and salvation from God. He reveals to her that God is deeply and intimately involved with the lives of human beings: 'he told me everything I have ever done' and reveals to her his own purpose and ministry which extends beyond social and tribal boundaries. He is the Messiah, the Christ, which people believe in, but really don't understand.

So the Samaritan woman spreads the word about Jesus and her fellow Samaritans come to find out about him for themselves and believe in him. They don't just find themselves affected by the story the woman tells them; having heard it, they come to have their own relationship with Jesus, and this tells us about how we become Christians too. The disciples also provide another angle on the story. Their focus is on physical provision, the need of the human body for food, but Jesus talks about spiritual needs which are also just as important 'I have food to eat that you do not know about'. This again echoes what Jesus learned in the desert when he realised that food is not all that we need to live, but also 'every word that God utters'.