

Sunday March 15, 2020 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church

Call to Worship – Read Psalm 95

Open with a word of prayer

Bible Study - Read Exodus 17:1-7

Exodus 17:1-7. Context. The wilderness in the Exodus story is clearly a place of death: the people are utterly helpless on their own. They survive only because God provides for them, in particular with manna (a sugary, wafer-like substance) and quail. Even though they had been slaves in Egypt, they constantly looked backwards to their relatively comfortable circumstances there, and complained bitterly. In this week's reading, the issue is water. The resentment between Moses and the people gets worse: the people act as though they can command God to meet their needs, and Moses has come to equate his own authority with that of God. Remarkably, in spite of willfulness and stubbornness all around, God provides. But even as the story is told, the quarrelsomeness of the people overshadows the gracious gift of God. (Details: The wilderness of Sin is located in the NE part of the Sinai peninsula; Horeb seems to be used interchangeably with Sinai.)

Our Current Context

Life for many was going along pretty well. The stock market was growing. Many were able to pay off their credit cards from their Christmas debt. Our daily routines have felt normal. But now this coronavirus has come to visit us. Who knows for how long. Schools are closed. Companies have shutdown. Employees are working from home. Every part of the world has been affected. Some people have contracted the virus are in the hospital or at home in quarantine. Some people are in fear. Some people are anxious. With every cough some are wondering do I have it. Our economy has been impacted as the stock market has lost about 25% of its gains.

The Israelites had a hard life. They were enslaved. God heard their cry and liberated them from slavery. God set them on a journey toward the Promised Land. For the most part the journey was going well. The people were moving forward. Every so often there were complaints. And they got lost in the wilderness. People doubted and wondered about God and God's plans for them. They challenged Moses' authority. Moses wondered why God called him to lead the people. He didn't need this! Moses questioned God and moved between giving up and trusting God.

Are we wondering about God's plans for us today? Do we feel like God doesn't know what is going on or are we listening to God and feeling God's presence in these uncertain times?

Read Exodus 17:1-7 again

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the story, what questions do you have, or what doesn't make sense to you in the story?

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

Read Exodus 17:1-7 again

Here are some reflection questions. Choose one or two of them to discuss. Again, write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

- 1) We are all on a journey. We are at different stages on the journey but we are on this journey of life together. When have you been spiritually thirsty and demanded water from God?
- 2) What is it you are spiritually thirsting for in this coronavirus pandemic? What do you need to keep going?
- 3) When has God delivered you from a situation and later you felt God had forgotten about you or was trying to harm you?
- 4) Who do you identify with in the story, the Israelites (complaining to or testing God) or Moses (trying to lead your family, a small group at church, in the community or work, etc.)?
- 5) When was the last time you really felt God's presence?

John 4:5-42. Context. In last week's reading from John 3, a "leader of the Jews" named Nicodemus sought out Jesus in the middle of the night, a traditional time for theological discussion. But in this week's reading nearly everything about the story is reversed: It's noonday, and it's Jesus who approaches an anonymous woman who was a Samaritan (Samaritans were heretics in the eyes of the Jews of the day, and thus to be shunned). This was a conversation forbidden on two counts: gender and religion. Beyond the external comparison, Nicodemus never did understand what Jesus was talking about: "born from above" / "born again" (the same word in Greek, *anōthen*) and simply faded from the conversation. But the Samaritan woman, although misunderstanding Jesus at first ("running water" / "living water" – another play on the same Greek word, *zoe*), carries on what is the longest conversation between Jesus and anyone else in the gospel. She eventually becomes a witness who brings others to faith in Jesus. As they talk about the Messiah, to identify himself with that figure Jesus uses the phrase "I AM" ("I am he" in the current translation). This phrase echoes the shortened form of God's sacred name that God revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai ("I AM WHO I AM"), and is used here for the first of several times in John's gospel.

Read John 4:5-42

Reflection. The encounter of Jesus and the Samaritan woman is all about crossing boundaries. It symbolically portrays the conviction that no one is beyond God's love, and that anyone can take up the invitation to trust in Jesus and God's promise of a life always in God's presence. Most of us, on the other hand, are quite comfortable with the boundaries that we've inherited or erected. When was the last time you stepped out of your comfort zone to share even in a small way the radical love of God for all people?

Closing Prayer:

Lord God, you are the provider of every good and perfect gift. We thank you for the living water that quenches our thirst and sustains us. May we seek to always feel and recognize your presence with us. Help us to trust where you are leading and guiding us so that we may give you glory and accomplish your purposes in our lives. In your Holy name we pray! Amen! and Amen!