

Sunday, March 12, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church

Bible Study

Exodus 17:1-7, John 4:5-42 and Psalm 95

Third Sunday in Lent: “Give Me Water”

Open with a word of prayer

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In groups of two or three, have participants respond to the following: “Name a time you were physically or spiritually thirsty.”

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. (Notes: The ‘wilderness of Sin’ is located in the NE part of the Sinai peninsula; ‘Horeb’ seems to be used interchangeably with Sinai.)

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.

Psalm 95. Context. This week’s psalm starts out with the psalmist praising the LORD who is above all other gods, who created the entire universe, and who chose the people of Israel by bringing them out of bondage. Towards the end of the psalm (“Do not harden your hearts...”), it is God who speaks, recollecting the episode of Exodus 17 as a negative example not to be followed. Indeed, it was the constant rebellion of the people against such a great God that led to them wandering in the wilderness for a full 40 years – otherwise, it would have taken only a few short weeks to travel the distance from Egypt to Canaan. Tradition has it that the generation who left Egypt – and yearned to return – would die over the course of the wandering; while the generation that had been born in the wilderness, who knew no other life than one utterly dependent on God’s grace, would be the generation to enter the promised land.

Read Exodus 17:1-7, John 4:5-42 and Psalm 95

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

Read Exodus 17:1-7, John 4:5-42 and Psalm 95 again -

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

Some reflection questions –

- In the Exodus passage, the people quarrel with Moses, and Moses cries out to God. What might we learn about humanity’s nature from this passage? What do we learn about God?
- What thirst or need of the Samaritan woman does Jesus satisfy?
- How does this empower the woman to become an evangelist for Jesus?
- How might the woman be a model for how we too can become evangelists for Jesus? What thirsts does Jesus satisfy for us?
- Why might some seek to fill their thirsts through fame, status, or prestige more than through the grace and mercy of Jesus?
- How does satisfaction of our thirsts come through letting go and laying down much as Jesus modeled for us in his life, ministry, and death? [In letting go and laying down our searching for fame, power, wealth, etc., we are better able to be filled by the Holy Spirit.]

Closing Reflection Question

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

Gracious God, You are not removed from our wrestling, searching, and suffering. Because of Jesus' crucifixion, we know you can empathize with our weakness, struggles, and pain. Because of Jesus' life, we see what true humanity empty of self-glorification looks like as well as full trust in the power of the Holy Spirit sent by the Father. This Holy Week, send us so that may we have the eyes to see the suffering and joy of your creatures. **Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord's Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven

hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,

on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power

and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.