

Year A: Lent 3 Ex 17:1-7; Ps 95; Rom 5:1-11; Jn 4:5-42
St. Barnabas, Florissant: March 15, 2020

I offer these thoughts in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.....

“The people thirsted there for water.” Seems like a fairly simple statement of Scripture at first glance, doesn't it? The Hebrews have been wandering in the hot, dry desert, and they're thirsty. What could be more normal?more ordinary?

But isn't it true at any time in human history.....and isn't it true at any level of human journeying, of a worshiping community, of an entire society, that the people thirst?.....that you and I thirst?

And this human thirst may be for many different things: for peace --- in the world, in our community, in our hearts;.....for hope --- for a better world, for a better life;.....for meaning --- in a life that too often seems to be only endured, in a hot, dry desert of empty wandering.

PAUSE

And, of course, “the people quarreled with Moses.....complained against Moses.”

Isn't it true that, during those times of “thirst,” at times of longing, at times of insecurity, at times of lost-ness, there's a very real tendency to look for a scapegoat, for a focus for our fear and confusion? And don't leaders, our parents, our government officials, our pastors, often provide that focus? Don't they often bear the brunt of our feelings and our complaining?

But then “Moses cried out to the Lord...” Leaders are human, too, with their own particular fears and insecurities.....with their own particular sense of being lost and abandoned.

All these very human responses sound in Moses’ cry, and each of us is very wise to acknowledge similar feelings of helplessness and resentment in ourselves.

PAUSE

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘....take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go.’”

Here, I believe, are more valuable lessons for us. *Shared* leadership, *shared* decision-making, is much better than trying to shoulder all the burdens ourselves. We are actually most vulnerable when we try to reserve all the decisions to ourselves.

And God’s instructions to Moses about the staff, and the previous crisis at the River Nile, are reminders to us that we have certainly faced other crises before, some of them even worse than whatever the present situation might be, and we’ve come through them with God’s help.

PAUSE

Finally, when Moses follows the leading of God, Moses strikes the rock, and the water really does gush out. By giving up control, by allowing God to do God's work in God's own way, the hidden presence and generosity of God in the desert are once again clearly and bountifully affirmed.

PAUSE

The hiddenness of God, the God who is always ready to satisfy our thirst, is shown in another way in this morning's Gospel passage.

A stranger is sitting by the well, when the woman comes to draw water. This woman's life isn't easy, for her coming during the heat of the day shows her to be an outcast in her own village. If this weren't the case, the woman would join the other women of the village during the cool beginning of the day.

And now, what's this Jew doing here, sitting by a Samaritan well?

The stranger startles her when he very gently asks for a drink of water, and her wonder increases because a man shouldn't be addressing a strange woman in the first place, and his being a Jew, and her being a Samaritan, well.....

But Jesus quickly shifts the ground under her.....he begins to speak of living water, whatever that is.....and about how those who have this living water will never be thirsty again.

"Well, that will make my life easier," she thinks. "Give me this living water, so that I won't have to come here day after day to draw water."

But Jesus' response further disconcerts her. "Go, call your husband, and come back."

She somehow finds the courage to be honest, and she replies, "I have no husband."

Jesus acknowledges her honesty, and goes on to remind her that she has had five husbands, and currently living with a man who is not her husband.

Scared now by this revelation, she declares Jesus to be a prophet and quickly changes the subject. Thinking that a theological conversation might take the prophet's attention away from her messy marital situation, she questions Jesus about where and how to worship. "Are Samaritans right, or are you Jews right?"

Jesus, however, refuses to buy into her ploy, and tells her that such details of buildings or church furniture are irrelevant. Jesus calls her (and us) to a much deeper level of integrity and insight. "...true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."

At this, the woman begins to sense something more in this Jewish stranger Wonders if he might have insight into the coming Messiah.

And then, here in the midst of her confusion and wonderment, the Messiah stands before her (and us), hidden in the disguise of the familiar, and says, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

PAUSE

How often have we, like the Hebrews in the desert, been thirsty and we've complained against God because of our thirst? How often have we tempted and tested God, demanding miracles in the midst of our deserts?

And how often, if we can look back with total honesty, has God rewarded our finally giving up of control by giving us water that overwhelms us and satisfies our thirst in ways we could never have dreamed possible?

How often, like the woman at noon, have we come looking for a well to satisfy our thirsty longings, and encountered an ordinary stranger who turned out to be most extraordinary?

And how often, if we can look back again with total honesty, has God stood before us in that ordinary stranger to take us to much deeper levels of our lives, and to remind us once again that giving control of our lives over to God will satisfy our thirst forever?

PAUSE

Lent is a time to reflect ... to reflect on our thirsts, to reflect on the ways we look to our own power to satisfy those thirsts.

Lent is also a time to realize once more something else. If we remember that we don't have to do it all by ourselves, and if we'll turn over control of our lives to God, and if we can open our eyes to the many ways in which God comes to us again and again in the ordinary events of our lives, we can arrive at the Easters of our lives and we'll be able to answer with certainty the question, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

AMEN.