

Old Testament lesson: Exodus 17:1-7

New Testament lesson: John 2:1-5

“Strike the rock,” says God, “and water will come out of it.” That’s kind of like a fountain. Here in Kansas City, we are surrounded by fountains; more than 200, in fact. And this weekend, we are drowning in water; more than 2 inches in fact. Had I known this was coming. I would have preached on Noah’s flood rather than water from the rock. This sermon was always going to require your imagination- and even more so now.

Listen to these words of the 4th century bishop Saint Gregory of Nyssa drawing a comparison between a fountain and God. “A person who approaches (a) fountain marvels at the endless stream of water always gushing forth and bubbling out; never could he say that he has seen all the water.

In the same way, the person looking at the divine, invisible beauty will always discover it anew, since it will be seen as something newer and more wondrous in comparison to what he (or she) had already comprehended.”¹

In other words, water from a rock is like God giving of himself to us. This is exactly what we see happening in today’s Old Testament reading. The Israelites are traveling through the wilderness after God frees them from captivity in Egypt. Then they come to a place where there is no water – imagine that. Instead of trusting in God – who performed miracle after miracle getting them out of Egypt – they complain about Moses, saying, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?”

Can you imagine?!? Things aren’t going your way and instead of trusting in God you find someone to blame. Nah, we never do that, do we? Actually, we do it all the time. We are a fault-finding people, all of us. It’s human nature. Like all things about human nature, there is a good and healthy aspect of fault finding, and a not-so-good, unhealthy aspect of fault finding.

When we take our complaint or concern to someone in charge, trust that it will be well-received and acted on, and allow time for that to happen, things actually get better. However, if we complain to others, remain skeptical that anything will change, and prove it by having unrealistic expectations, things get worse.

The problem is, we don’t always know whether our complaint or concern is part of God’s plan or not. Take for instance, the story from Our New Testament reading today – the wedding at Cana.

¹ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Commentary on the Song of Songs (Brookline, Mass.: Hellenic College Press, 1987), 14.

Jesus and his disciples are at a wedding and the host runs out of wine. Jesus' mother says to him, "They have no wine." Jesus says to her, "What concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." And instead of leaving it at that, Jesus mother says to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

What's up with that? Is she testing Jesus? Does she know something he doesn't? Is God working through her to lead Jesus along his path? Who knows? All we know is that Jesus had them fill jars with water, pour some out, and it was turned to wine. And from that time onward, the disciples believed in Jesus, trusted in Jesus. Trusting in Jesus; trusting in God. That's what both of these stories are about – water from the rock and wine from clay jars. One is a life-and-death situation; the other a social embarrassment.

When we trust in God for both the big stuff and the small stuff, life gets better. God uses both our big concerns and our little annoyances to bring us closer to God and to equip us to better serve the Lord.

But that takes trusting in God, no matter what. We see this with the Israelites in the wilderness. It couldn't be clearer. The first thing they do is blame Moses, with no concern for God. "Give us water to drink," they demand. To which Moses replies, "Why do you test the Lord?" It couldn't be clearer that this is about their trust in God, not about Moses.

But they just don't get it. They turn to Moses and say "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us ... with thirst?" As if Moses brought them out of Egypt, apart from God.

But don't we do that, too? When things go wrong, don't we spend too much time and energy and upset blaming others, rather than looking at our relationship with God and what God would have us do?

When the Israelites blame Moses, apart from God, there is no hope for them. No hope apart from God. They not only are physically dying of thirst, but more importantly, they are spiritually dying of thirst – their spiritual well of inner peace and well-being has dried up. They've forgotten about God.

But then the conversation shifts. Moses turns to God, he cries out, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me (to death)." Not the best example of turning to God – he shows no concern for the people's thirst he's only and is only concerned for his own life. But God can work with that. We don't have to be perfect; we just have to turn to God.

So God says to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people...; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile" – when God worked his first miracle against Egypt. "Strike the rock (at Horeb)," and water will come out of it so that the people may drink."

That God of ours! Always looking out for us – for all people – quenching our thirst, both physically and spiritually. Most importantly, spiritually.

God uses our physical needs to develop our spiritual faith, so that we can face any trouble or concern with quiet confidence and abiding peace.

Take a moment now and think of a physical need that you have, something that's troubling you. Maybe it's health, or financial, or relational – having to do with friends or loved ones. Maybe you need a better job, or you're not doing well in school. Whatever need or struggle you have that comes to mind right now – close your eyes and think about it. Everyone, close your eyes and imagine God leading you to a solution. Keep your eyes closed.

Maybe the solution is somewhere down the road for you. Eyes closed. Maybe it has to do with reexamining your need and what it represents for you. Eyes still closed. Whatever your need is, imagine the solution washing over you like water flowing from a rock in the wilderness. Open your eyes and imagine God covering you with his love and provision and safety, like water flowing from a rock quenching your deepest thirst. Just receive this. Let the cleansing, refining, purifying spiritual waters of the Lord wash over your need or concern or complaint. Feel the freedom, the peace, the release from that which has hold of you but is now somehow eased and clarified. The blessing of God flowing freely into your life. Isn't that different than how we usually face our problems.

When we blame others or complain about them, all we get is frustrated. When we trust in God to meet our need and help us work through our concerns, we have a peace that passes all understanding. That sense of peace and love and hope and joy in the Lord is available to you at any moment. All it takes is having the presence of mind and the purity of heart to turn to God and to trust in the Lord.

Our place in relationship to God is not to demand, but to receive. I hope you got something out of your experience here today – particularly through the water from the rock. But however God touched you or will touch you through worship today, I hope it is profound. I hope it is life-changing.

God never abandoned the Israelites in the wilderness, no matter how it might have felt to them. And God never abandons us – you. Whatever your need is, whatever your concern, take a moment right now, and turn to the Lord. Throughout this week and in all your moments of need, turn to the Lord. And in turning to the Lord, let us be receptive to the Lord – not making demands – but rather receiving what he would provide, following where he would lead.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Divine Companion, from beginning to end, we rest in your embrace, though we do not always acknowledge or recognize your presence.

All along our days, you journey with us. Sometimes you are a loud shout to help us to heed your call. Sometimes you are a quiet whisper to help us to listen.

You help shape our questions and are patient with our answers. You are full of compassion and care like a loving grandmother.

You love us tenderly like a mother cradling her child. You give us visions to soar like the eagle. Like a wise doctor, you heal our souls with a gentle touch.

O God, how wonderful you are. How good it is to be in your presence. We bring to you our whole life, our joy and our grief, our patience and our worry, our dreams and our despair.

Like a long-time friend, you know us, beginning to end. And you embrace us into new life, a life in keeping with your desire for us, as expressed in the prayer that you taught us to pray, saying:

**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 debts, as we forgive
our debtors;
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,
For thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, forever. Amen.**