

Exodus 17:1-7

**“Go to the Source”**

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***The Paraphrase Version of the Scripture Reading: Exodus 17:1-7***

Introductory Piece:

Children, please gather ‘round for the Bible story. This fall, we are listening to the stories from the book of Exodus about how God freed the Hebrew people from slavery. Today the story tells us some more about their day-to-day life in the wilderness and what happened when they got thirsty.

The Story:

The Israelites moved from place to place in the wilderness. Families camped with their animals. At a place called Rephidim, they couldn’t find any water to drink. No streams. No ponds. No rain. They were upset about this and quarreled with Moses, demanding that he give them water. They also blamed him for bringing them out of Egypt just to kill them from thirst! Of course, Moses couldn’t create water out of nothing and told them that their argument was with God.

So Moses cried out to the Lord God: “Help me! These people are so angry that they are about to kill me. What should I do?”

God told Moses to pick up the staff that he had used to cross the Red Sea and go with other leaders to a special place outside of the camp. “I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Hit the rock hard with your staff, and water will come out.” Moses did exactly this and enough water for all of them came forth!

Because the Israelites quarreled with Moses and tested God, wondering if God was really among them or not, these places were renamed “Test” and “Quarrel.”

They say that human beings can live without food for about three weeks, but without *water* only three or four days.

**We need water to survive in the wilderness.** Whether we are in an actual desert or a wilderness of great uncertainty, water represents our material needs and our spiritual well-being. In chapter 17, without water, the people are getting testy and having difficulty again trusting God: “Is God among us, or not?” An issue of thirst quickly becomes a question of theology!

**So how did they go about finding it? How do *we* find the water we need in the wilderness?**

**First**, the Israelites looked for water all around them in nature. I imagine them seeking out pools and streams, examining their buckets and jars for every little bit left,

and trying to capture the drops of morning dew. You and I would first go to the faucet or the fridge, but the point is that we look in the obvious place first.

**When this tactic came up short**, they turned to their human leaders for water. *You and I* would phone the water department or petition our governor. The Israelites ran and complained to Moses: “Give us water. Are you trying to kill us? Do something!”

What could Moses realistically do? A magic trick? But when folks are in the wilderness, whatever it is, they may stop taking responsibility for their own health and their own future: “*You* do it!” It strikes me, for instance, that during political campaigns, we also demand that our leaders give us ‘water’ and more, that is, make the bad guys go away, guarantee our security, make the economy run, and soothe our souls. Of course, they ought to do their jobs, but sometimes we expect *impossible* things of them. Politicians in turn promise what *they* can’t deliver: the sun, moon, and stars.

Moses must have felt like parents do that cannot feed their kids during this pandemic. Horrible and helpless! Their frustration increased. Quarreling turned into conflict, and verbal conflict almost into violence. Moses felt threatened and at his wits end.

Abraham Lincoln once said: “I have been driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go.” In *his* desperation, **Moses also figured out that the best thing he could do was to go to the Source.**

He elected to mature in his spiritual development. It was only when he went to the Source – to God, the Creator and Redeemer – that he could see his staff in the corner and remember how God had led him into and out of the court of Pharaoh, parted the sea, and steadied them all. Instead of treating God as the last resort, Moses went to God as the first resource! That’s when he could finally hear the still, small voice: “You’re my chosen leader. Take the staff and go on *ahead* of the people. Don’t get caught up in the quarreling.” It also dawned on Moses that he needn’t be alone; he should take the elders of Israel, even the naysayers, along. Then, God spoke to his heart: “I am, and I will go before you. Come.”

Together, this team of leaders went out one more time, looking for water in all the *unlikely* places. Some archeologists think that they wandered into Kadesh-barnea where things were still green and growing.<sup>1</sup> Its limestone out-croppings called to Moses. A particular crack captured his attention. It seemed that God, the Source, was pointing and whispering: “This one.”

**When the Israelites went to the Source, everything else came together. Nature, human leaders, and Divine strength all lined up.** Like Big Papi, Moses’ swing connected at the sweet spot and hit it out of the park! Water flowed forth!

This story tells me that *today*, when it comes to the search for a vaccine, we need to go first to the Source of healing, work *with* nature and with each other until all three align for success.

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<sup>1</sup>Emil G. Kraeling, Rand McNally *Bible Atlas* (New York: Rand McNally and Company, 1961), 108. The entry also tells of a report of Major C.S. Jarvis that a petty officer in his company struck water from limestone rock in this area.

As a nation we all should go to the Source, too, so that leaders in government can work together with citizens *and* with the environment in order to achieve wholeness and well-being for all.

Congregations that are searching for a pastor need to do the same. You will see the one that God is preparing for RCC by going to the Source, crisscrossing the landscape of candidates, and discerning, leaders and congregation, together.

Jesus told the woman at the well to go to the Source by coming to him. “If you ask me, I will give you *living* water and connect you to the spring of water gushing up to eternal life!”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>John 4:7-15