

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, March 15, 2020

Text: Exodus 17:1-7 and John 4

“God responds to our cries for help!”

This has been quite a week. Many of us have entered uncharted territory with the Covid-19 pandemic. I can relate to the Israelites in our first lesson wandering in the wilderness... into the unknown.

Life has changed as we know it... at least for the time being. Schools, athletic events, mass gatherings, work, and churches are shutting down or modifying operations to create safe distance. I am grieving many of these changes in our world and to my daily routine. For example, this week I realized how much my identity is wrapped up in sports. Here I am complaining about cancellation of WIAA Sports Tournaments, March Madness, and the Masters Golf Tournament. And these changes bring real grief to those competing and their families and fans. But then again, we are talking about using wisdom to combat this highly contagious virus and keep people safe. Many of my initial concerns pale in comparison to those who are infected or who have died from corona virus.

On a softer note, I am wondering why we need so much toilet paper? Pun intended.

In our family, we have a parent that stays home with Marcella, but what about all the families who don't have a parent at home? What are they going to do for daycare with schools closing? How is the church being called to help?

In our first lesson, the Israelites went from a place of familiarity in Egypt, where they knew what their daily routine would be... to a place of unknown. In Egypt, they knew where their next meal would come from as slaves. They knew they would have clean water to drink and a bed to sleep in.

Then, their leader Moses, called by God, led the Israelites out of slavery into freedom into the wilderness where they were now complaining of thirst. God just got done providing Manna a chapter earlier. Their faith was being tested again. How quickly they forgot

about God's provision. They said to Moses, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst? They were fed up with Moses leadership and the results of their new precarious situation.

Moses was overwhelmed with all their complaints. It reminds me when we take family trips. If I don't do a good job of explaining where we are going, what we are doing, where we are eating next, and how long to get there, our kids get anxious and bombard us with questions: "Are we there yet?" "How much longer?"

I have to give Moses credit here, however. He threw his hands up in the air and cried out to the Lord. "What shall I do with thee people? They are almost ready to stone me." This is a very faithful way to deal with problems... to throw up your hands and hand it over to God. And God heard Moses and responded. This reminds me never to discount the power of prayer. Then God gave Moses step-by-step instructions on how to combat the problem:

1. Go ahead of the people.
2. Grab some elders
3. Bring your staff
4. Meet Me at the rock of Horeb
5. Strike the rock with your staff, and water will come out of it
6. Have the people drink.

Notice God had Moses do most of the work in order to find water. It took effort and energy to solve the problem. It took brainpower and muscle.

God is still providing for us today to combat the Covid -19 virus through the medical and research community and natural resources available to us.

The Israelites wondered in our lesson "Is the Lord among us or not?" We may wonder this too when it seems like God has left the building. But the answer is "Yes". God is with us. The Lord heard the complaints of the people. The Lord responded to Moses. Moses responded to the Lord with action. And the people drank water.

Was this an easy process? “No”. Was it painful for Moses to feel like the people were ready to kill him? “Yes.” Were the people wondering what the future held for them or if they were going to live? “Yes.”

Here God demonstrates a history of journeying with people through wilderness times. Were the people constantly thankful and believing God was there? “No” but God still showed grace and provided. The Israelites continuously forget God’s provision. They will keep complaining. They will turn away. They will build a golden calf to worship because they thought God abandoned them while Moses was away.

God can work good out of times when we are overwhelmed and uncertain. Romans 8:28 says, “We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” I hear stories of life slowing down for people. Families are spending more time together. More people are going for walks. I saw many families at Target buying board games. I couldn’t even find Candyland.

This week, I heard Giannas Antetokoupo, from the Bucks, pledged \$100,000 to help the Fiserv Forum Workers who will be out of work for a while. The Bucks matched it and others are contributing. Other players like Zion Williamson are doing the same. People are listening to others and responding. A member of the church contacted me and asked if I knew of any elderly people who need someone to shop for them.

God has a history of showing up, especially when people are down and out. A great example is the Woman at the Well story in our Gospel for today. Here Jesus breaks down all kinds of social barriers to love a Samaritan woman who is alone at the well and has had 5 husbands. Her testimony of how Jesus knew her background and accepted her as is brought many other people to faith.

Our testimony of how God shows up for us during these wilderness times can bring hope to others and a relationship with Jesus. We know God is with us always to the end of the age because Jesus

promised this. On the cross Jesus showed us how far he will go to love us and forgive us.

God has a history of entering into our suffering and showing us away through.

Amen!