

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: When We Are Thirsty

Lesson: Exodus 17:1-7

17 The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² So they quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?" ³ But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?" ⁴ Then Moses cried out to the LORD, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me." ⁵ The LORD answered Moses, "Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶ I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

(Slide 1) Friends, have you ever been truly thirsty? What I am asking is not simply the feeling of thinking, "It would be nice to have a glass of water." I mean the kind of thirst where your mouth is completely dry and your throat feels tight.

That kind of strong thirst may come after working outside for a long time. It may come after walking for a while on a very hot and humid day.

When we are truly thirsty, something interesting happens. In that moment, many other things stop being important. Usually, many thoughts pass through our minds all the time. Right? Even during worship, even while the pastor is preaching, thousands of thoughts may pass through your mind. You might think about things you need to do this afternoon. You might think about a meeting you have tomorrow. Or you might think about the news.

But when we feel a serious thirst, we do not think about the news. We do not think about our to-do list. Only one thing becomes important. That is water.

Sometimes thirst shows us what our real priorities are in life. Thirst also reminds us of a very simple and human truth: we are not able to live completely on our own. We cannot live on our own, and we are always incomplete.

As we live our lives, we sometimes experience thirst. It may be physical thirst, or it may be spiritual thirst. In today's Scripture, we meet people who are thirsty.

In the Gospel of John, a woman comes to a well at noon to draw water. When we read this today, it may not seem strange to us. We might simply think, “That could happen.” It may seem very ordinary. But in the cultural setting of that time, it was not natural. In the ancient Near East, noon was the most hot time of the day. Most people would go to the well early in the morning before the sun rose, or in the evening after the sun had gone down.

But the fact that she was there at an unusual time tells us something. It shows that she, too, was experiencing thirst—whether it was physical thirst or spiritual thirst.

(Slide 2) And in Exodus, the whole community of Israel is wandering in the wilderness without water to drink. They are tired. They are walking through a dry desert. The only things they can see are dry soil, stones, the blue sky, and the sun. And then the water runs out.

In the wilderness, thirst is not simply uncomfortable. When the water is gone and people feel thirsty in the wilderness, it can mean death.

Fear of death began to take hold of the people. They could not see beyond the situation they were in. They could not find any hope in their circumstances, and they thought that they were going to die.

As they poured out their complaints and frustrations about the situation they were in, they began to think that Moses was the one who had brought them into this situation. They placed all the responsibility for their suffering on Moses, and they began to complain and blame him.

They said, “Moses, why did you bring us out of Egypt?” “Did you bring us here so that we and our children and our livestock would die of thirst?”

At first glance, their reaction may sound overly dramatic. But if we are honest, we might find something familiar in their response.

Because thirst does not only happen in the body. Sometimes thirst happens in the soul. People thirst for peace. People thirst for hope. People thirst for meaning. They thirst for something that can truly fill their hearts.

But there is a deeper problem hidden in this story. The Israelites were not only thirsty for water. They were spiritually thirsty. They were doubting God.

They ask a question that reveals what is really happening in their hearts. They question Moses, and they test God. They ask, “Is the Lord among us or not?”

That was the real crisis in the wilderness. The problem was not only the lack of water. The problem was the lack of trust.

“Is God really with us?” If we are honest, this is still a question many people ask today. When life is difficult, when things do not go the way we expected, when it seems like our prayers are not being answered, people begin to wonder: “Where is God?” “Is God really with me?”

But the truth is that the Israelites had already seen amazing things that God had done. God delivered them from slavery in Egypt. God parted the Red Sea. God gave them manna in the wilderness. God had always been with them, and God kept showing this to them through Moses. But when they faced another problem, they forgot. Their trust in God was replaced by fear.

From God’s point of view, it might have been very frustrating. Again and again, God had shown them things that could only be done by God. If it were us, and we had shown kindness to someone again and again, if we had given them many good things, but the moment they faced a small difficulty they immediately began to complain and blame us, we might become angry. We might become tired of them. We might not want to see them anymore.

But God did not respond that way. Even though the people forgot God’s grace and God’s work, and even though they poured out their complaints, God did not respond with anger. God did not abandon them. Instead, God said something surprising to Moses.

(Slide 3) God said, “I will stand there before you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it.”

This is a very strange moment in the story. In those days, when someone was being judged, that person would stand in a certain place before others. But here, God says that He will stand on the rock.

While everyone in the wilderness was doubting Moses and testing God and pouring out complaints, God did not reject them and did not strike them. Instead, God chose to stand there like someone who was being judged.

Now imagine this scene in your mind.

After hearing God’s word, Moses went to the rock at Mount Horeb. God was standing on the rock that Moses was looking at, because God had said He would do so.

Then God said to Moses, “Strike the rock with that staff.” In a way, it was like God was saying, “Strike me with that staff.” When Moses struck the rock, water began to flow out from it. Life flowed out from the rock.

This moment—God standing on the rock at Horeb and Moses striking the rock with his staff—reminds us of something familiar. It reminds us of Jesus Christ.

(Slide 4) Jesus came into this world and showed many miracles. He revealed to people that He was the Son of God. But people continued to test Him and doubt Him. Jesus did not try to prove Himself through more miracles. Instead, He stood on the cross and was struck. Through His suffering, He gave life to the world. Just as water flowed from the rock in the wilderness, grace flows to us from Christ.

This leads us to the Gospel of John. In John chapter 4, Jesus meets a woman at a well. She came looking for ordinary water. But Jesus says something unexpected.

He says, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst.”

Jesus is speaking about something deeper than physical thirst. He is speaking about the thirst of the soul. Many people try many different ways to satisfy that thirst: through success, through possessions, through relationships, or through entertainment.

But again and again people discover something. The thirst comes back. But Jesus offers something different. He gives “living water.” It is a life rooted in the grace and presence of God. And this is the good news of the Gospel.

Even when we doubt, even when we complain, even when we question whether God is truly with us, God does not abandon us in the wilderness.

Instead, God meets us there. In the wilderness of fear, in the wilderness of uncertainty, and in the wilderness of our own questions. God provides.

Just as water flowed from the rock for Israel, God provides living water through Jesus Christ. So today let us ask ourselves a simple question. Friends, what are we thirsty for? When our hearts feel empty, where do we look?

The good news of Scripture is this: God knows our thirst. And God does not ignore it. In Christ, God gives living water that can truly satisfy the human soul.

May we trust this truth, and when our lives are shaken, may we continue to trust in God and rely on Him. Thanks be to God. Amen.