

# Third Sunday in Lent

## POTABLE WATER IS A HUMAN RIGHT

Exodus 17:1-7

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Analysis by Peter Keyel

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. 2The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" 3But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" 4So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." 5The LORD said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. 6I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

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## DIAGNOSIS: We Need Water for Life

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *Where's the Water?*

The people go out from the wilderness, doing as God commands, and yet there is no water for them to drink. How often do we do as God commands, and find ourselves worse off for it? Lacking water, or something equally vital to surviving in this world? That whole connecting others to Christ's living water sounded so great when we heard the sermon, but the reality is we go out to a place that is parched. Doesn't God understand that water is a basic need? Where's that 'Ask and it shall be given to you' now? What about those who don't have potable water?

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) :** *We're Thirsty*  
Moses tries to assuage the people's fear and remind them to trust in the LORD, but that only goes so far. It's not something superficial that is being demanded, but basic water for drinking so that they do not die. This is a need that God is failing to meet, even after the people left their comfortable world because of their trust in God. Wasn't that enough? And isn't this us, out in the world? Going out to give living water isn't easy. Forgiving as Christ has forgiven us comes naturally sometimes, but all too often, it's hard. Standing in solidarity against those systems that kill is tough on us, emotionally. Didn't God promise us that we would never thirst again? Didn't God promise to sustain us in our hours of need, especially when those hours of need are a direct result of trusting in God?

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) :** *The Thirst Is Killing Us*

Moses fears for his life. This thirst is worth killing over, which isn't surprising because Death is on the line. The people see two choices before them: force Moses to give them water, or die. Is it any surprise that they choose the former? Nor is it just for their own sake, but for their children's as well. This isn't any metaphorical death—this is dying, slowly, of thirst. Of watching the weakest and most vulnerable ones we care about die first. How can God possibly be doing something like this?

What kind of God is it who leads us out and then leaves us to die? Many in our world do still die of thirst because they lack potable water. Less drastically, we find that in following God we often enter untenable situations. Isn't doing good supposed to bring life? Aren't we supposed to prevail against the very Gates of Hell themselves? If we trust just a little harder, or if we were a little holier, maybe. We must not be good enough, or maybe that Promise wasn't for us. Either way, it seems that God's judgment for us is death. That death seems to be our reward for thirsting to do God's righteousness and bringing Christ's living waters to the thirsty.

## **Prognosis: Christ Gives Us His Life**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** : *Living Water Brings Life*

Honestly, it doesn't look good for us, the people of Israel or Moses. God is killing the people with thirst, but they are so livid that they may kill Moses since they can't kill God. God intervenes to save Moses's life in Exodus. But God does not intervene hundreds of years later when God's own Son is crucified by the very people for whom he came to bring life. In so doing, that Son's life is as forsaken by God as our own lives seem to be. In the midst of this death, God acts and raises Jesus from the dead. Death is not the final Word—not for God's people wandering in the wilderness, not for Moses trying to lead them and not for us. This Life comes freely, not because the people are owed it, or to save Moses's or our skins.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution)** : *The People Will Drink*

Through Moses, God creates water where there was none before. There is also a striking change that comes about from this water. Where before there was just a rock, a spring gushed. For a desert culture where water is life, there couldn't be a more

startling transformation. Similarly, Christ's living water comes even in the face of our doubt, and even in the face of death itself. We know that Christ did die, but also lived again. That Promise is for us, and it is a Promise that we do drink (and eat) in the Eucharist.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Water Springing from Rocks***

The Israelites drink and are sustained to continue their journey in the wilderness. We know that they never make it out, at least on this side of the grave. They also complain, get hungry and it seems like nothing has changed. Moses even names the rocks Massah and Meribah for the later generations of hungry and thirsty people. But there is a change. Water springing from rocks. Manna coming down from the sky. God continually brings life from death for God's people. We have the Living Water that will see us through death. We can act, trusting God's Promise that we will not be forever lost in the wilderness, that God will come to raise us on the last day for the sake of Jesus. We can do that even in the face of certain death, not because death is any less certain, but because it isn't final. Whether from thirst or otherwise, death is not the end for us. The most surprising thing of all is that as we come from drinking, we see the signs of the miracles God has wrought. Water will come forth from rocks. Manna will come down from the sky. God will bring life from death for all of God's people especially at those places named Massah and Meribah. And in drinking, we become caught up in God's transformation. We can work to bring Christ's Living Water to those who need it and potable water to those who need that.