

# St. Paul: On The Same page

03.16.14 for Lent 3a

## Day One: Exodus 17:1-7

*[The Israelites] 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?"<sup>3</sup> 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?"<sup>4</sup> Then Moses cried out to the Lord, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me."  
...<sup>7</sup> 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?"*

I thought about listing examples of complaining, but I've only got 4 pages. Then I thought about listing examples of how we fail to trust God, but, again, the space limit. A list of all the things we want like the Israelites wanted water? Ditto.

Considering that none of us has ever been lost in a desert for days and weeks and

months, or gone without water for an extended period, this story has a surprising familiarity for us. Even though it's outside of our experience, we seem to experience it all the time!

We lack something. Anything. And it becomes the focus of all our thoughts. It becomes the Most Important Thing. It becomes the one thing that we must have or all is lost.

Envision a child who has lost that one toy, or who didn't get the right color cup. That's us. "Lord, I can't go on if you don't give me..."

God deals with Israel like an experienced parent. Calm – Capable – Unhurried – He gives them water.

Now, like a parent, he asks them (and us), "Have you learned anything from this?"

Have you learned anything from the many times God has come through – he has provided – he has saved you? Israel asked, "Is the Lord among us?" But God asks, "Are you ready to trust me?"

**Prayer:** *Father, at times I have worried that you left me, but you have always been there. Teach me to trust in you. Amen.*

## Day Two: Romans 5:1-8

*Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we<sup>1</sup> have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup>through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we<sup>2</sup> boast in the hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup>Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup>perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup>And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*

Paul writes that “we also glory in our sufferings.” But in my experience we don’t easily see anything good in suffering.

Still, as we get older we may gradually be able to see further out. A child given medicine that he hates might fuss and cry, even though that medicine will help him to feel better in less than an hour.

An adult willingly endures a shot or a dose of medicine because we know that in an hour or a day it will help us feel better. We’re even able to go through surgery, allowing someone to take out our knee and replace it with a

manmade device, if we believe that in a week or two we’ll feel better.

But it’s hard for us to see the good in suffering much further out than that. Suffering that will end in a year, or a decade, or at Jesus’ second coming, that’s suffering that we find harder to take.

But Paul says that our suffering changes us. It works perseverance in us – exercising our trust “muscles” as we hang on and wait. And that trust, that perseverance, changes our character. It makes us different people. We become people who can suffer, and yet have hope.

We have hope because we can see ahead to the deliverance of the Lord. And because we can clearly see God’s love at the end, we can also see his love now – right now, even in the midst of our suffering.

**Prayer:** *Dear Jesus, I know I complain. I don't always see you're your loving hand in my life. I do not know the purpose of the burdens I am bearing today – but I do know where they will lead me. They will lead me to you – always to you. Lord, help me persevere. Amen.*

### Day Three: John 4:5-26

*When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"*<sup>8</sup>

*<sup>9</sup>The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)*

*<sup>10</sup>Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."*

People all over the countryside were asking Jesus for things. When Jesus came to a town, people brought him the sick and the dying. They brought the blind and the deaf and the crippled. People asked Jesus for miracles, and after he gave them amazing gifts, like giving them bread and fish, then they only asked for more. And all along there was something that Jesus wanted to give them – something much greater.

The fact that this woman asks for nothing shows how isolated she has been. Her life has been marred by sin, her sin and the sins of others, and she has suffered the result of sin. It cuts us off. It makes us live alone with our guilt.

This poor woman does not know what Jesus could do for her, so Jesus offers it. He tells her what is available.

Not healing. Not wealth. Not food. Not a new home. He invites her to ask for living water.

She assumes he only means ordinary water. "Living water" was a phrase used to describe flowing water, like from a spring. And she knows the only local source of water is this well.

But Jesus has a living water that, if she will receive it, will mean that she will never thirst again. Instead of hiding in her room and avoiding others, this water will restore her to a guilt-free and joyful life.

When I teach young people about prayer, they mostly think of long lists of things to ask for. They can hardly imagine how much greater God's gifts can be.

Is that you? Do you only look for meager gifts? Or are you ready to ask for what Jesus dreams of giving you?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, I am thirsty. Give to me a water that will spring up in me and give me life. Amen.*

## Day Four:

<sup>19</sup> “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet.” <sup>20</sup> Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

<sup>21</sup> “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.” <sup>22</sup> You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup> Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

<sup>25</sup> The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

<sup>26</sup> Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”

“Squirrel!” That line from the movie “Up” has become a shorthand way to describe a quick distraction. Whenever someone is getting too close to pointing out what is difficult or uncomfortable for us, we quickly point to something else.

That’s what this poor woman tried to do. Jesus was getting uncomfortably close to her personal life, her grief, her guilt and shame. So she brings up an old theological argument, thinking that it will take attention away from her.

But Jesus cuts right through the distraction to the heart of the matter. “A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth...”

If that time “has now come” then there can be no more distractions, no more dilly dallying. It’s time to face the reality – the Savior has come! What will you do with him?

Maybe you’d like to offer a distraction too. Maybe it would be more comfortable to point out problems in the world rather than admit the problems in yourself. But the time has now come. There’s no more time to waste.

“I, the one speaking to you – I am he.” Jesus is here to talk to you!

**Prayer:** *Dear Savior, I have looked in every other direction for help. Now let me turn to you and you only. Save me! Amen.*