

*March 19, 2017*

*Exodus 17:1-7:*

***“From Jesus to Us ...  
Comfort for Troubled Times”***

*Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Before Jesus comforts us with himself, he makes us uncomfortable with ourselves. In fact, if we are not uncomfortable with ourselves and the truth about who we are, then we hardly have any room for him and the everlasting comfort he brings. That is part of what our Old Testament lesson for this morning is all about.

Think about it for a moment. Does God really lead the Israelites into the hot and dusty wilderness so that they might discover their need for water? Of course not! Rather, they have come to the wilderness to learn about themselves, their need for God, what it means to have him, and to hold onto him no matter what the day may bring.

There is quite a context to this account that is easily missed. These people saw the plagues. They painted blood on the doorframes of their houses and stayed alive as they watched the Egyptians carry out their dead. When they found themselves at the edge of the sea with Pharaoh's army pressing against them, all they could do was watch as the sea divided, enabling them to cross over on dry ground. When they were safe on the other side, the sea covered their enemies. God made bitter water sweet and he sent them bread from heaven. All of these amazing events were not without the grumbling of the people:

All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me (Exodus 17:1-4)."

Despite the consistent goodness of the Lord, the Israelites were having a rough time believing that the Lord was good. Perhaps one could argue from our lesson that it was God himself who had led the Israelites directly to a place where there was no water. It certainly would seem that the Lord was out to get them. This causes us to ask: "What kind of thing is going on here?"

As I have said on other occasions, God likes to play a little game with us, much like a father might play with his child when the child is very young. The father grabs a favorite toy from his son. After the look of shock, the child might become desperate for the toy, jumping up and down, crying and screaming, even trying to climb his father's leg to get it back. Finally, the father gives the toy back with a smile as if to teach the child a very important lesson: "Even when you think I am doing something that appears to be against you, I want you to believe that I am not out to get you. I really don't want your favorite toy. In fact, don't you remember that I bought that toy for you in the first place? However, I don't want you to convince yourself that your toy is everything and more important than me, but I gave you the toy because I love you.

And I want you to believe that even if I were to take it away from you, you have me, my heart always loves you, and is only interested in what is best for you.”

When a father repeats the game, there hopefully comes a point in time when the child is no longer shocked, gone is the desperation to get the toy back, and all characteristics of a temper tantrum come to an end because the child knows and believes that the father is not that way. He isn't going to steal and keep the toy. The Israelites acted as if God was not a father who could be trusted, and so they kept grumbling at God despite his mercies. The Lord repeatedly played the game, tested them, not to see how they would respond, but so that they would discover what was in their own hearts, and seeing the truth, they would cease being filled with themselves and trust in God's love for them.

Indeed. The Lord was testing them. The trouble was that their shock, desperation, and temper tantrums would not come to an end. Instead, they responded to God's testing by attempting to test God. You know there are children that never seem to learn the game. They lose their minds every time you take away their favorite toy and even become more aggressive. This becomes a test for the parent, and what was at one point a teaching game can end up hurtful.

When we test the Lord with a spiritual temper tantrum, because he isn't doing what we think he should do in our lives, it betrays the fact that we are demanding and expecting something that we believe that we deserve. We do not appreciate love for love sake, but rather expect it because we think we are loveable. Instead of thinking this, we are supposed to know that our favorite toy was simply given out of love, and behind the toy is the love a person, and we are to believe that since that person loves us, that person would do us no harm, even if in a moment it might appear that harm is being done.

For example, there comes a time when most children believe that they are being harmed when parents refuse to allow them to eat nothing but soda and chocolate. But the parent sees what is at the end of a steady diet of soda and chocolate. The parent knows that it will not facilitate healthy growth, and will not allow it. Like the Israelites wanting to stone Moses . . . our children may not want to stone us, but they might think about running away from home because we won't feed them with only soda and chocolate.

Listen! The Lord has to deal with us in a sinful, messed up world - a world shaped by our own rebellion. The game is unfortunate, but it is necessary to see the truth. Like I said at the beginning of the message today, “before Jesus comforts us with himself, he makes us uncomfortable with ourselves.” We are brought to our own hot and dusty wilderness journey to learn about ourselves, our need for God, what it means to have him, and to hold onto him no matter what. The rest of our account states: “And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.’ And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel (Ex 17:5-6).”

It was as if the Lord had said to the people, “Here is your favorite toy back, the one I gave you in the first place. Drink it up. But don't you understand that behind the water is me? Don't you believe that

my heart is for you? Don't you believe that I will get you through? And with this physical water, do you not spiritually see me in it all, and that I am greater than the physical water you are drinking?" The apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10:4, "For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers . . . drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness."

God was not pleased with them because they refused to hold onto the love of Christ. That is the warning. We are to see Jesus and know and believe that in him God is never out to hurt us in any way. Isn't that what Jesus is doing to the Samaritan woman at the well when she is living a troubled life, even to the point of grumbling - wishing that she didn't have to feel thirst and come to the well to draw water every day? Jesus has already said to her that the water he gives - "whoever drinks of [it] will never be thirsty again . . . [but] it will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." This water is Jesus who never lets us down.

With that, we are finally brought to our theme: **From Jesus To Us . . . Comfort for Troubled Times**. The point is rather simple. In all troubled times, if you say "it is because of the hot and dusty wilderness," or you say "it is because God put us there," or even if you say "the well is deep," we are to never lose sight of the Lord's heart in the cross. His heart is a heart that is described by Paul in the way, "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things (Romans 8:32)?" The heart of our Father is his one and only Son. We did not deserve it, but out of love he sent this rock so that he might be struck for us, that water might flow out in order that we might drink the fullness of heaven. Of the Son it is said, "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us!" Having been saved through his life, may we trust in him even during hot, hungry, and thirsty days!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott