

March 19, 2017 – Exodus 17:1-7, Romans 5:1-8, John 4:5-26

As the father of a 3 year old, I hear a lot of whining. No one taught my daughter how to whine. I certainly didn't. She just does it. It comes naturally to her. As it does just about any other child.

You know what I'm talking about, I'm sure. That constant complaining. That just seems to wear you down with its persistence. Maybe it's a TV show she wants to watch. Maybe it's a toy she wants me to get for her. After her recent birthday party, it was a near insatiable desire for cupcakes. Every 5 minutes. Every day. For two weeks straight.

So as someone who hears whining on a regular basis, it's easy for me to look at our Old Testament lesson for today and say, "Ugh... the Israelites are whining yet again." Because it feels like they are always complaining about something. They're always griping and moaning and grumbling. And Moses is always going back to the Lord to say, "They're doing it again, God. What do I tell them?"

But I wonder if I'm oversimplifying things when I say that. I wonder if maybe we're being a little hard on these people who really are put in some pretty difficult positions.

I mean, first of all, it's not like God has been real quick in answering their prayers. They spend 430 years in Egypt. And they don't hear a peep from the Lord during that entire time. As one Pharaoh after another enslaves them and persecutes them and murders their children. It's hard to expect them to simply turn around and say, "Hey, God's with us again! Let's depend on him for everything without question."

And, on top of that, the things they complain about are usually pretty serious. "Pharaoh's army is going to kill us all and we're trapped against the Red Sea. This isn't good." "We've run out of food and we're about to starve to death. This is a problem."

And then, finally, today's lesson. "We've run out of water and we're about to die of thirst. We may have been slaves in Egypt. But at least we had water." It's a valid point. This is not a good situation to be in.

Poor Moses is caught in the middle. On the one hand, the people are coming to him with a very real, very serious problem that needs to be addressed. And on the other hand, the Lord has called him to be an example of trust and faith in the Lord God who is bringing them to the Promised Land.

And yet, does God ever chastize them for their complaining? Moses does. Moses tells them that they should not put the Lord to the test. And he's right. In a perfect world full of perfect people, they would have complete trust that God will provide. That is, eventually, the goal.

And, later on, God will also become more harsh with them when they doubt. He'll punish their grumbling and complaining with the fiery serpents we heard about last week. Or with wandering through the desert for 40 years.

But here? Not so much. No instead, everytime they complain, God simply provides. They worry about whether they will be destroyed by the Egyptian army. God provides a way through the sea. They worry about whether they will starve to death in the desert. God provides manna and quail to eat.

They worry about whether they will die of thirst in the wilderness. God tells Moses to strike the rock with his staff. And clean water comes pouring out to quench their thirst.

Over and over again, they ask and God provides. Yes, he waits until they're in some pretty desperate situations. Yes, he waits until they turn to him for help. Yes, he waits until they have to choose but to trust him. But, in the end, he always provides. And no one dies.

It's a lesson for us, I think. About our own relationship with God. Because sometimes it feels like being God's people means that he should be making things easier for us. That we should be on the receiving end of God's power and glory. That heaven and earth should be handed to us on a tray.

I mean, after all, we are a royal priesthood. A holy nation. A people belonging to God. Sons and daughters of the king. We're not like those other people. Why should we ever have to suffer?

And there are plenty of preachers out there who will tell you the same thing. Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyers and countless other name-it-and-claim-it preachers who insist that the life of Christians is meant to be gumdrops and rainbows.

But the history of God's people says otherwise. The history of God's people says that trust in the Lord does not come easily. That parched tongues and grumbling bellies and anxious minds and all the other desires of the flesh are powerful motivators to turn us away from the one who has promised to save us. That sin is always right there beside us, giving us an easy solution to our most difficult problems.

We see that again in our Gospel lesson, but from a different angle. Here is a Samaritan woman. A Samaritan woman whom Jesus reveals is living a life of sin.

She has had not one, not two, but five husbands. And she's currently living out of wedlock with a man who isn't her husband. Now, what happened to the other five marriages and why is she living with this man? We don't know. We don't really need to know. That's not the point.

The point is that she is trapped in sin. It has become normal for her. Divorce and sexual immorality have become easy for her. Sin has become easy for her. It has become a very easy solution to her problems.

And so she turns to sin as the answer again and again and again. She keeps drinking and drinking and drinking from this water that doesn't quench her thirst. She is drinking like someone lost in the desert, dying of dehydration. Yet, it never satisfies. It never restores. It never heals. And it will ultimately lead only to her death.

And so Jesus offers her something different. Something better. He offers her water that will never leave her thirsty again. Water that will well up inside her to eternal life.

It is, really and truly, no different than the water that God brought to the Israelites in the desert. Because, you see, the Israelites may have thought they were only getting plain water for their bodies. But really, God was offering them both physical water and spiritual water.

Because every time they turned to the Lord for help and he answered them, their faith in his faithfulness was strengthened a little more. Everytime they found him lovingly and mercifully satisfying their needs, they learned a little more about the character of this God who had rescued them from slavery.

And that faith that God was putting into their hearts was indeed becoming a much more important spring of water than the one Moses had caused when he struck the rock with his staff. They thought they were suffering and dying with thirst. But in reality, they were only becoming stronger and more alive in their faith and trust in the one who could save them from sin, death, and the devil.

The woman at the well learned that same truth. That in the midst of her desert, the Messiah had indeed come. He had indeed explained all things to her. That in his Spirit and truth, he was teaching her to worship God in a whole new way.

A way that sees the inadequacy of sin and the deep fulfillment of God's grace. A way that sees that suffering does produce perseverance and perseverance, character and character, hope in God's provision. A way that looks to God's Son as the source of life and salvation.

For he too suffered hunger and thirst and the attacks of his enemies. He too was tempted by the easy answers of sin. He too faced death for us and lived again. So that we might know without a doubt that when Jesus talks about water that wells up to eternal life, he knows what he's talking about.

For he is that water. And he is our life for all eternity. As Paul tells us, he is indeed our hope in the midst of suffering. Because while we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. While we were still sinners, drinking from water that wouldn't ever quench our thirst, Christ died for us.

That we might be washed by his Spirit. That we might have our hunger satisfied by his Body and our thirst quenched by his Blood. That we might see in him the grace and truth of the Messiah. Come to explain everything to us. Come to explain just how much God loves us.

So maybe there's nothing wrong with a little bit of whining. If it means that you're turning to the heavenly Father whose always watching over you. If it means that you are resting in his power and love. If it means that you are finding your hope in him. Then that's exactly what he wants to hear. Amen.