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Exodus 17:1-7
10/1/2023

The Peril of Thirst

Good Morning Church. Today we have a rich text that I think tells us a lot about what it means to be human. First, we are fragile creatures that need food and water to survive. There is a poetic rule of three. You can survive three minutes without air. Three days without water, and three weeks without food. So the wilderness is a dangerous place and the Israelites are right to be scared. So why all the drama?

Please pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts, be pleasing to you. Our daily bread and living water. Amen.

Let me start with another story. When Esau returned from hunting, he asked his twin brother for a bowl of soup. So Jacob bargained, I will give you this bowl of soup for your birthright as the firstborn son. Esau responded, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?"

Fascinating how easy it is to give away a precious possession when you are in need. When someone is desperate, food can become an effective bribe, a little bowl of soup traded for the whole world. Our needs make us vulnerable to others.

Would you trade away your freedom or the freedom of your fellow human for a bowl of soup or a drink of water? I do not want to minimize or demonize, because humans have throughout history sold themselves or their family members into slavery to feed themselves. Exodus 21 lays out the law concerning selling yourself into slavery due to indebtedness. With the merciful adaptation that all Israelite slaves were to be set free on the 7th year. In fact, Deuteronomy, 15 adds that freed slaves should be given a portion of the master's flock, grain, and wine. But while slavery existed, for the Israelites it was supposed to be temporary, not generational slavery like in Egypt.

Our needs make us vulnerable to continued disaster.

However, in their desperation, the Israelites are ready to throw away their freedom. They are going through their own temptation. They have to choose between the nostalgia of the past, or if they are going to look to the future. They cannot serve both Egypt and God. Pixley, A Liberation

Theologian says, “The is the tendency of oppressed peoples to cling to the security of the old, no matter how evil it may be, instead of venturing out into an uncertain future.” By looking to the past in Egypt they are not giving the future a chance to be born. What can we learn by looking at the uncertain, creative future? Is this following the leading of the Holy Spirit who is making something new?

Our needs make us vulnerable to stagnation.

However, this newness is not a wish-fountain. We worship a wild and untamable God. Consider how in the Gospels the adversary tempts Jesus with the power to turn rock into bread if Jesus would only worship him. But unlike Jesus, they put God to the test, they demand that God give them water, complaining against Mosas and quarreling with God. It is like asking for a sign, like a child asking for lighting before they are going to follow God. This is complicated because the Israelites do depend on God for food and water in the wilderness. God provides enough for all of their needs. But God tempers this provision with substance, the Israelites are only supposed to gather enough for a single day. How do we balance reliance on God with not putting God to the test? How do we balance our needs with our greed?

Our needs make us vulnerable to greed.

Brothers and sisters. Today, we do not need to worry about our hunger or thirst. Indeed I love that one of our rituals is sharing a meal with one another. A communion, a love feast. I hope that this meal and our fellowship will make us less vulnerable to turning back to Egypt. I hope that communion will be a reminder of how James tells us our faith is an action in the world, feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked. That it is important to stand with the desperate, in material ways that go beyond saying the right words or having the right politics. That we can taste and see that the Lord is our provider and sustainer in the midst of our own wilderness journeys. Now let us set a feast so that all can eat.