

Exodus 17: 1 - 7

¹From 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?"

In a sermon, it's not unusual to invite the events of scripture into our lives by seeing them as a metaphor.

To talk about Jesus' 40 days of fasting in the wilderness as an entry point for us to consider the wildernesses of our own lives. We don't compare it to the time we spent forty days fasting in the desert, because, well, as far as I know, none of us have done that.

We hear the call to Esther to stand up "for such a time as this" and consider what the calling God has for our own lives- because I don't think any of us have experience with what it is like to be a queen whose people's very existence is being threatened.

Last week, when the Israelites were hungry, we talked about what it is like to trust God's abundance in the midst of freedom rather than what it is like to have an empty belly.

And today, to talk about water in terms of obedience and trust in the God who created, redeemed, and sustains us.

But... that seems hard to do, when, according to yesterday's department of defense update, 55% of residents do not have access to clean drinking water. That's almost two million people. Men, women, and children. 95% of the island remains without electricity.¹ 75% of the island has no cell phone service at all.²

And when FEMA, according to their own website, advises people to register for aid by a web site or telephone number, it's incredibly difficult.

¹ <https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1330501/dod-accelerates-hurricane-relief-response-efforts-in-puerto-rico/>

² <http://www.businessinsider.com/puerto-rico-power-outages-2017-9/#it-will-take-time-for-puerto-rico-to-fully-rebuild-you-can-aid-victims-by-donating-to-charities-that-are-providing-relief-on-the-ground-10>

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-puertorico-governor/puerto-rico-governor-says-relief-arriving-to-storm-ravaged-rural-areas-idUSKCN1C60YO>

<https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/Situation-Update-Sept-28.pdf>

It's not just Puerto Rico. Dominica, Barbuda, the Virgin Islands. The devastation is difficult to comprehend, and we are a long way from these places and people being restored.

As we consider them we also know that for many, this kind of tragedy is, just, well, life.

Currently, according to water.org 844 million people living without access to safe.

That's 244 Puerto Ricos.

And it's their every day.

Puerto Ricans are American Citizens, but those around the world living without water are just as much our brother and sisters. Our sons and daughters. And on this World Communion Sunday, it is a truth to which we hold fast.

Knowing all of these statistics that represent real lives and real families. There many people, too many men, women, and children in this world who are thirsty. Today's text is not a metaphor.

Many years ago, I was traveling with Sarah Allan, just the two of us. She was just a little over one a year old. Our trip was over and we were trying to get home. There were flight cancellations and flight delays and we were facing spending the night in the airport long after everything had closed. I had nothing more to give her to eat or drink and only one diaper in my bag. And on the television, I saw the horror of the aftermath of Katrina happening and the masses on overpasses and people on rooves and the Superdome many with their children.

I looked down at my child and knew that for all of my worry and panic and uncertainty about what was ahead, I knew that at some point in 12 - 24 hours I would be safe. And these mothers had no such assurance. It was a glimpse, a shadow, a slice of what they were experiencing.

It's the closest I can come to relating to what these Israelites were feeling. It was enough.

I imagine many of you can relate. Or have stories like this of your own. Or experiences far more like what the Israelites, the survivors of Katrina, Maria, Irma know.

What are we to do?

First, we can do what Mr. Rogers told us to do when things are difficult. Look for the helpers. And there are lots of them.³

The Cajun Navy that traveled to Houston after Harvey with their boats to pull people from houses and off of roofs.⁴

³ <http://www.pbs.org/parents/rogers/special/scarynews-thoughts.html>

<http://www.snopes.com/radiotv/tv/scarynews.asp>

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cajun_Navy

<http://www.cnn.com/2017/08/29/us/harvey-cajun-navy/index.html>

The cruise ship passengers who, when their cruise ended early because of the pending storm stayed on board for 16 more days not as passengers but as workers as they evacuated island residents.⁵

The United States Government has suspended the Jones Act, to make relief supplies easier to get to Puerto Rico.⁶

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance has already approved funds to be spent by Presbyterian Leaders for the purchase of basic necessities.⁷

And the fifty ham radio operators who are going or who are already in Puerto Rico to help.⁸

The good news isn't just all out there, either. Here the youth have been filling backpacks to give to students at Davis-Stuart.

Reach out and Read gives books to children age 6 months to 5 years, almost 600 books in the first six months of this year.

And this afternoon, at 2:00, there is a group meeting on the porch of the General Lewis Inn to see how we here in Greenbrier County can find ways to help those who live a world away on the island of Puerto Rico.

Not all of these are directly aiding relief from the hurricanes, but all of these things, a part of refusing to accept the world as it is and choosing, instead, to work welcoming God's kingdom.

Like the Presbyterian organization Living Waters for the world. In recent years they have installed 845 water filtration and pumping systems and trained more than 2,000 individuals on their installation and maintenance.⁹

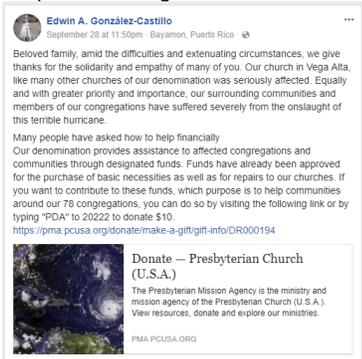
So. To sum up. The news is not all bad. The news is not all good. We've got work to do.

Let's look back at the passage from Exodus.

⁵ <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/cruise-ship-spends-16-days-sea-hurricane-irma-victims-article-1.3506146>

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/hurricane-irma-cruise-ship-passengers-return-home-after-relief-effort/>

⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/28/us/jones-act-waived.html>



⁷ <http://www.cnn.com/2017/09/27/us/puerto-rico-maria-ham-radio-operators-trnd/index.html>

⁹ <https://livingwatersfortheworld.app.box.com/s/1m7869ac522y9bggokt0req8xqwwv6k4>

The Israelites are thirsty. And I can't fault them for wondering if God was with them.

I can't fault them for being thirsty.

But as we look at this passage, we know that God was with them.

And I wonder how it might have been different if they had said, instead of complaining and doubting, "Hi God. We know you brought us here. And we know you've always taken care of us. So tell us where the water is, the water you created, and we'll get it! We'll go where you tell us to go. We'll do what you need us to do.

But, that's not what they said.

According to the language, Massah and Meribah, it is the place where they tested and quarreled with God.¹⁰

And yet, here's what we know.

- 1) God can take it. When the people don't understand. When they don't trust. God doesn't abandon them. God doesn't deny them. God can take it. Just as God can take it when we are angry or questioning.
- 2) There is water. Water does come out of the rock. And the water then follows them where they go, where they travel, so that they will always have water, just as they will always have manna.
- 3) God does God's part, but the people must do their part. Moses must strike the rock. The people must gather the manna that they need, not that they want. The people have a role to play in their own salvation.

And so do we. So do we.

The daughter who caused me to open my eyes when we were in that airport more than a decade ago will turn 14 in November. And I look around and see just how much work this generation has to do to make things better, because her generation deserves better. And we must also equip them to do better, because these are not issues that can be resolved over the short-haul.

Sharing resources.

Slowing and managing climate change.

Recognizing that it's not okay with God for any child to go to bed hungry or thirsty or afraid.

¹⁰ <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/kjv/luwn.html>

<http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/kjv/riyb.html>

הַסָּמָה Massah, from nissa, to test

מֵרִיבָה Meribah, from rib, to quarrel.

Confessing that the solution to any or all of this is not found in our own control, our own persistence, or even our own stubbornness - no matter how righteous that stubbornness might be - but in being people of faith, and allowing that faith to lead us to actions.

In summarizing today's text, scholar Walter Brueggemann says, "Moses obeys. Yahweh delivers. Water comes; Israel drinks. The crisis is averted. The narrative tells all this in one brief sentence—no trimmings, no commentary, no explanation, no embarrassment. We are given only a simple, bare act for all to see, a lean story for all to hear. It is a situation in which Yahweh sustained life, but in lean, precarious, anxiety-producing ways that require deep trust."¹¹

Deep trust. If we are hungry for faith. If we are thirsty for God's kingdom, it begins with deep trust.

Which begins here, in the word. Surrounding ourselves with the text, because that is where we will meet Jesus Christ.

It begins here, at the table, eating fully and drinking deeply, because this is the sustenance we need for the journey ahead.

The way forward begins with trust.

¹¹ Walter Brueggemann, Charles B. Cousar, Beverly R. Gaventa, James D. Newsome, *TEXTS FOR PREACHING: A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV, YEAR A*, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995) page 202.