

Sermon – October 27, 2024
“Water from the Rock”
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: Exodus 17:1-7

Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, visit, fill hearts open to you, and through our hearing and your anointing of these words, transform us into Christ's image. Bless those with ears to hear and lead us out into fruitful labor in Jesus' mission right here, right now. Lord, come and astonish us with your word this day. Amen

The Spirit of Jesus in me greets the Spirit of Jesus in you and brings us together in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Good morning! “The grass withers and the flowers fail,” “but the word of our God endures forever.”

I would be remiss if I did not remind us that today on the church calendar is Reformation Sunday. It is a Sunday when we remember that Martin Luther stood before the emperor when he was on trial, facing death for heresy, and presented his defense based only on scripture. When told he must recant all of his teaching, thoughts, and understanding, and follow the leadership of the pope and the Church instead of the word of God, he stood fast on God's word, replying, "Here I stand; I can do no other." We also will find a blessing if we open the word of God daily and seek to renew our minds, letting ourselves be transformed into the image of Jesus. Luther's life is a key moment in the life of the Church as he sought to turn the Church back to the word of God and use scripture to order the lives of believers so that we who follow Jesus might live more completely in obedience to the word of God. We would do well to honor Luther and his courage

to hold to the word of God and give God glory for Luther's work, bravery, and commitment to the word of God. We too should strive to be found looking daily to the word of God for guidance and seeking to stand upon it.

For those not reading along in Exodus, I will point out that Israel's need for water found in today's reading is not the first time that Israel has been thirsty during their wilderness journey following God. The first time they were thirsty was when they came to water that was bitter and not suitable for drinking and Moses was shown a piece of wood to put into the water to make it drinkable. The second time they needed water God led them to an oasis with twelve springs. Now they are thirsty again. It appears that they have traveled far enough from the last known water source that if they turn back to go to it, they would perish on the way. They need water and are concerned for themselves, their children, and their animals. They are afraid of dying and are no longer grumbling about Moses and the lack of provision but have entered a new phase: quarreling. Quarreling has the idea of resorting to physical violence. As these thirsty people have interacted with Moses, so intense has their exchange been that Moses has begun to fear they are about to stone him. Yet, he cries out to God on their behalf. Sitting in our pews it may seem strange to us that people who picked up manna from God in the morning could so quickly lose sight of the fact that God can be trusted to meet their needs.

When God responds to Moses' cry for help, He does not come and strike down the people. Instead, God sets aside their quarreling and testing of Him and provides water. God does not tell Moses how to deal with the people and their threats to kill him. Instead, God sends Moses ahead to the rock at Horeb and has him take some of the elders, the leaders of the tribes, with him. God is not teaching Moses to transform the people of God into those who faithfully follow Him, but is providing for the needs of His people. God responds as a loving and patient Father, telling Moses where to find water.

Moses obeys God, takes the elders with him, and, as instructed by God, strikes the rock, the rock on which God is standing, and water comes forth, water that flows back down the dry riverbed to where the people are waiting. I try to imagine the response of the people when after days of no water they have an abundance. Have we ever come in from outside on a hot day when we have not had a drink of water, get a cool drink out of our refrigerator, take that first drink and feel the cool water go down our throat and into our stomach? I have never been without water for three days and struggle to imagine what a drink of cool water might feel like in that

circumstance. I suspect it is very good. I can only catch a glimpse of the joy water brought to the people of Israel and their animals. A loving God provides, and the people rejoice in the abundant water provided by God in the midst of a wilderness, a dry place where there is no water. God is in control not only in the places of abundance but in the wilderness. In all places our God provides.

On this part of their journey, God has led Israel to a place where there is no water to be found. The bread from heaven has been rained down on them but they can find no water, and without water, they will all perish. Notice the words here are “the people thirst for water.” We are told what they thirst for and it is not justice, righteousness, or the love of God. The people of Israel thirst for water to sustain their lives in the wilderness. They have a need for water, and they want this need met. Israel does not yet trust God and so they test God by asking in essence, “Is God present and in control in the wilderness or not?” They are saying, “Give us water and we will know God is with us and is in control.” Moses points out to them that they are testing God, but it is God who tests Israel to see if they are obedient to Him and will trust Him and not Israel who is to test God. The people of Israel are to trust and obey even if they are thirsty and about to perish.

Israel is not alone in a struggle to trust God. When we approach God with our terms for belief in God by telling Him something like, “If you will do what I want or give me what I think I need, then I will believe in you,” we are also those who are putting God to the test. We do this in many forms, asking God to show Himself to us in the way we want Him to respond. When we approach God on our terms and not as the holy ruler of the universe, we also test God. Our struggle as sinful humanity is our tendency to bring God down to satisfy our needs, our thirst, our desires, and not to trust and praise God to provide for our needs, trusting Him to provide in accordance with His will. Our tendency is to approach God as Israel does in the wilderness, testing God by saying, “O God, I am thirsty and I need water or I fear I will perish. Give me water or I will not believe in you.” We question if God is real and is in control of our situation. We hold in our hearts that if our demands are not met in our time frame and on our terms, we will return to Egypt and follow God no more. Instead, our approach should be to trust God and, even if we die, to give God the glory in all of our situations in life. God knows our needs before we ask, before they form in our minds, before they are on our lips. God is leading the people of Israel in the wilderness, and they think they have come to a place where there is no water, and

they are about to perish. Yet God is in control and through Moses' staff, the staff that took away water in Egypt, God now brings forth water for the people of God in the wilderness.

The water that the people of God received in the wilderness only takes care of their thirst for a short while. They will become thirsty again and will again need water or they will perish. Yet the water flowing from the rock continues to flow, providing them with the daily water that they, their children, and their flocks need to live. The manna they are eating each day for their daily bread, that only satisfies their hunger for a day because it does not take care of their hunger for ever, points to a better bread yet to come, the bread of life that is yet to come. So also, the water flowing from the rock in the wilderness does not stop their thirst forever, yet also points to a better water yet to come: living water.

Jesus went to Jerusalem secretly to celebrate the Feast of Booths, and for seven days water was brought from the pool of Siloam and poured out before God as a reminder of God's provision. On the last day of the feast, Jesus came out of hiding and shared with the crowd amazing news. In John 7:37-39, we read, "On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified."¹

We know that Holy Spirit is poured out on all flesh at Pentecost. We, as believers in Jesus, have Holy Spirit dwelling in us; living water dwells in each of us. Yet we are not repositories meant to be filled and hold only a little living water. Instead, the children of God are meant to be those from whom "shall flow rivers of living water." The gift of the Spirit we have been given is to be flowing out of us into the lives of others. We are to be sources of life-giving water that flows out of Jesus into us and then out of us into others, bringing thirsting people life-transforming, living water. A believer's life is not life in a wilderness sustained for a day by water, but, through belief in Jesus, we receive eternal life. Our lives are reconciled to God through Holy Spirit, living water in and from Jesus Christ. As Christians, we are to be sources of rivers of living water to those who are thirsting for real water and cannot find it in the wilderness where they are searching, the world where we and the lost live. We are to be sources of living water even to those who are angry with God because they have a thirst that they cannot satisfy with the things they find during their wilderness journey. Our mission is to help another person

find living water. Just as the water from the rock flowed back to the people of Israel in the wilderness, we are each to be a source of living water to people in this place, a place where people are perishing in the wilderness of the world from the lack of true, eternal, life-giving water. We are to let God's love flow through us into the lives of other people. We are living in the time between the pouring out of Holy Spirit and the arrival of the promised crystal river flowing from the throne of God and the arrival of the Lamb. We are those who are seeking to follow Jesus into the wilderness and bring new life to all whom we meet. We know where living water comes from, the rock, Jesus, who was struck and died so that if we believe in him, living water is given to us and is in us. We are those who are to be praying for the lost, seeking to meet them, sharing our source of living water with them in all the ways we can and helping them to become new sources of living water by coming to believe in Jesus as their savior. We need to be prepared, ready, and willing to change our interaction with the world, from being separated from the world to those who are in the world pouring out the living water we have been given into the lives of others. As we pour out the water in us, we are refilled with a gushing spring that flows up to eternal life. Are we ready to be a source of living water to a person God puts in our lives this day? People get ready, believe in Jesus who is the source of living water, turn to him, open your hearts to him, receive living water, and then let it flow out of your hearts as a mighty rushing river into those who are perishing, who are dying in their thirst for living water.

How do we receive living water? Just like the Israelites in the desert, living water flows from God to us. We need only to ask for it and receive it. When we come to believe in Jesus, we are given Holy Spirit. We are given living water, and as we abide in the love of Jesus and love others, we receive and give living water. By opening our hearts to Jesus' love and being filled with Holy Spirit, we receive living water. We are given the gift of Holy Spirit when we pray and ask Jesus to give us living water. We, like the woman at the well, have to come to a place where we are ready to release our sin and let Jesus fill us with living water. We, like the woman, ask Jesus to give us living water and we wait for Holy Spirit to come and fill us.

Are we thirsty for living water? During the closing hymn, I invite us, if we are thirsty for more of Jesus, to come to the altar, kneel, or stand before Jesus, open our hearts to him and ask him to fill us with living water. Even if we have been filled before, there is always room within us to receive a fresh filling of Spirit. Come and linger as long as you need. If you can't come to the altar, raise your hands where you are and ask Jesus to fill you with Holy Spirit. At the end of

the account of the woman at the well, we are told she leaves her water jug there. She goes out to take living water to others. Living water isn't contained in a clay vessel but in our hearts that we might carry Jesus' love to others. Come and be filled and go and pour out living water where Jesus is at work.

Pray with me: Jesus, we received the Holy Spirit when we came through the waters of our baptism. Lord, come and do a work in us that we might see the lost around us with your eyes, go to them, and love them with the love you have given us. Lord, forgive us for holding onto the living water you have filled us with and instead, open us to be channels of your love going forth to quench the thirst of the lost. Lord, let the water flow forth from you into your peoples' hearts that we might be rivers of living water in this dry and weary land. We pray in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, because he has anointed us to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent us to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Go forth into Jesus' mission and let the living water flow into us and out into the thirsty around us. Amen

ⁱ John 7:37-39 Bibles, Harper . NRSV Bible with the Apocrypha (p. 3209). Zondervan. Kindle Edition