

**God delivers us Exodus 17:1-6**

*Welcome to our service.*

**Do you have things ready for communion together in a little while?**

**Let's pray.**

Our Father in heaven,

We come to you separated, yet together because we are all part of your family, children of yours, who need you. Lord, we always need you, but in these times, we feel our need of you more than ever. Bless us this morning as we gather around your Word. May you speak to us through your Spirit, and may we each know the beauty of your presence with us in our homes. Comfort us with your love. We remember those who always have to worship you apart from other Christians because of persecution or illness. We pray that you will be their comfort and strength and Deliverer, even as you are ours.

We pray in Jesus' name

Amen,

**Reading**

**17** The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. <sup>2</sup>So they quarrelled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink."

Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the Lord to the test?"

<sup>3</sup>But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?"

<sup>4</sup>Then Moses cried out to the Lord, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me."

<sup>5</sup>The Lord answered Moses, "Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. <sup>6</sup>I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. <sup>7</sup>And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarrelled and because they tested the Lord saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

**SERMON**

What would your house be called? Or what would our church be called? Moses called the place where the people of God had been Masah and Meribah. Those words mean 'testing' and 'quarrelling.' What would he call the place where we are if he was here? Would your house be called, "testing" because you keep testing the Lord – saying that if He was really with you, none of this would be happening to you. Or would your house be called "quarrelling" because you complain and grumble and quarrel with your leaders or your God? Or would your house be called "Peace" because you are trusting God in the midst of struggle and difficulty.

*I prepared most of this sermon before I listened to Steve's last week. As I listened, I thought that some of what I had prepared was a repeat of what he said. I considered changing my sermon. But I decided against it. I felt that God is wanting to keep on assuring us of some things. So as you listen, please consider that God has something to say to His people – to you and to me. And it's important enough for Him to repeat.*

The redeemed people of Israel had recently seen God freeing them from Egypt in a dramatic and miraculous way. And then they had experienced God looking after them by providing them food every day in the form of quails and manna. And then God turned bitter water into drinkable water for them.

But now once again they were thirsty. They were in a wilderness place called Rephidim and there was no water. After seeing again and again that a mighty, powerful God was caring for them, you'd think they'd simply trust God and pray for what they needed – or at least ask Moses to pray to God for the water.

But no!

Their first response was to quarrel with their leader. "If he was a good leader this wouldn't have happened. If he hadn't brought us out of Egypt, we'd be okay now. We'd have plenty of food and water to drink. It's *your* fault for leading us out of Egypt." They forgot that in Egypt they had been slaves. That their lives had been a relentless struggle to produce things for their Egyptian masters. They forgot that they had been eager to go. They looked back with longing at "the good old days," and blamed Moses for their predicament.

Truly they **were** in a life-threatening situation. In a wilderness place with no water. Hundreds of thousands of people. It was a desperate situation. And they probably panicked as they took in the seriousness of their plight.

But they were forgetting the most important thing. God was still with them. The same God who had saved them from the Egyptians. The same God who had fixed the water for them at Marah. The same God who every day provided them with manna. Their God knew what they were facing.

Perhaps because of their limited understanding of God, they thought he was like some of the false gods – limited in his power to one geographical area. But their God was different. They needed to know Him better.

Who was their God? He was the God who is present everywhere. He was the God who is powerful everywhere. He was the Creator of the universe. He had known since time began that they would face this crisis. And He had prepared a way for them. God knew where the underground streams of water were. The Creator knows His creation! This situation that looked impossible to them was possible for Him. But they forgot to trust Him.

Their leader Moses was desperate too. He had thousands of angry and fearful people on His hands. But Moses had a response that was different from the response of the people he was leading. Moses took his anxiety and his desperation to God. It wasn't a well-crafted and beautifully worded prayer – it was a cry from his heart. V 4 says, "Moses cried to the Lord, 'What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.'" Moses knew that he was totally inadequate to deal with the situation. He knew that his only help would have to come from the Lord.

You know, I have a feeling that all of us in the next weeks and maybe even months are going to be crying to the Lord. We are going to need the Lord to provide for us as we face financial difficulties. We are going to need His presence with us as we face loneliness and isolation. We are going to need His comfort and strength as we face various crises. We are going to cry to Him for healing and health. We are going to need His love to flow through us as we are confined to our houses with the same few people. We are going to need to cry out for His peace when we feel anxious and afraid as we go out to work. We are going to cry to Him with prayers of desperation that come straight from our hearts.

And that's okay. We don't need to pretend with God. He is not afraid of our emotions. We can tell Him what is on our hearts. Look at the Psalms – many of them are prayers of desperation and despair. They are the prayers of people who did not understand what was happening in their world.

I'm sure it's not a coincidence that we are studying the book of Exodus as a church. This book is about a people who had nothing to depend on but God. And it's about a God who was deliverer and provider for His people. It's about a God whose presence in the lives of His people and whose daily guidance of them was their only comfort and strength.

That's about where we're at now. Let's turn to our God, just like Moses did and just like the Psalmists did, and just like people have in every age and in every impossible situation. Let's cry out to Him.

Let's not have the limited view of our God that the Israelites had - no situation is too hard for God. Nothing is happening to you that God cannot bless you with His presence through that situation. Look for Him. Cry to Him.

*The story tells us what God did next and what Moses did after that.*

<sup>5</sup>The Lord answered Moses, "Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. <sup>6</sup>I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink."

So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. <sup>7</sup>And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarrelled and because they tested the Lord saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

The Creator God knew where the water was. One of the books I read last week calls this: anticipatory providence. In other words, God had prepared His way to provide for His people right back when the earth was created. He knew what His people would need, and it was ready for them! The exact rock in the exact place where it would be needed, with water flowing beneath it. And as Moses struck the exact rock that God commanded him to, the water flowed out. A lot of water. Enough water for thousands of people and their animals to drink. The needs of his people did not take God by surprise, and He had a solution ready.

How are you feeling in your current situation? Are you crying out to God, and then looking to see what God is doing? Way back, God taught me to stop looking at my situation, which at that time was unpleasant, depressing and unlikely to improve, and to look to Him, where I could find peace and joy even when my situation was not good. It was a valuable life lesson and changed the way I thought and the way I live.

Moses had learned that lesson. He cried out to God, and God showed him what to do that would help not only him, but his whole community.

Much later through the prophet Isaiah, God said, Isaiah 65:24 “Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.” God is already working on the answers to your problems. Before your heartfelt cry goes up, He is working. He is thinking of you and loving you – every day, every moment, of your life!

And he wants us to call on Him. In Jeremiah 33:3 he says, “Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.”

As we cry to our God, as we call to him, not only will He meet our needs, but He will reveal more to us about Himself. We will begin to know Him in a way we have never known Him before.

In Matthew 6:25ff Jesus told us

### Do Not Worry

<sup>25</sup> “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? <sup>27</sup> Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life<sup>l</sup>?

<sup>28</sup> “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. <sup>29</sup> Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’

<sup>32</sup> For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. <sup>33</sup> But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. <sup>34</sup> Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

These are not my words. They are the words of Jesus, and therefore they are true words. Your father knows what you need. Your Father cares about you. Your job is to trust Him. (Interestingly I had included those verses in this talk before I read Steve's piece in the Northern News. I think God wants us to take these verses into our hearts and minds today.)

Listening to a Chris Tomlin DVD about worship the other day, the speaker said, "Turn your worry into worship."

When you look at the Psalms, you'll see that's what the writers did. First, they poured out their troubles to God. They let rip with their emotions and their anxieties about what was happening in their lives. And then as they began to think about their God, they began to worship Him, and as they worshipped Him, they began to lose their fears. And even to find joy.

Psalms 5 is written by David. He starts off:

"Listen to my words, LORD,  
consider my lament.  
<sup>2</sup> Hear my cry for help,  
my King and my God,  
for to you I pray.

His emotions are deep. His struggle is real. But as He spends time with God, he finishes with:

"But let all who take refuge in you be glad;  
let them ever sing for joy.  
Spread your protection over them,  
that those who love your name may rejoice in you.  
<sup>12</sup> Surely, LORD, you bless the righteous;  
you surround them with your favour as with a shield."

Let's get back to our story. The people were desperate. They grumbled and complained to Moses. Moses took his problem to the Lord. And the Lord provided the answer.

Moses had a part to play in the answer. I wonder what he thought when God said, "Get your stick and go and hit that rock, and water will come out." I wonder if he thought, "Really? Will that really happen? What if I hit the rock in front of all these people, and nothing happens? I'm going to look such a fool!" I think that might have been my thought process if God told me to hit a rock to get water.

We don't know what Moses thought. But we do know what He did. He gathered some of the other leaders and he got his stick and he went and hit the rock. Moses was obedient to God. He trusted God and he did what he was told.

If we want to see God working powerfully in our lives, we need to be obedient to God. Have there been times in your life when you knew what God was saying, but you refused to listen to Him? If Moses had not been obedient to what God told Him, he wouldn't have seen the deliverance of the Lord.

There's an old hymn that we sometimes sing. It goes like this:

"Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey."

As they keep telling us all the time on the radio, we're going through unprecedented times. But our God has not changed. He's the same yesterday, today and forever. As we trust Him and obey Him, we will see His deliverance, and we will see His acts of power, His acts of kindness and caring.

Can I suggest that you start each day with a prayer to God telling Him that you will trust Him and you will walk beside Him all through the day, and a prayer at the end of the day where you give thanks to Him for the blessings you have received. And pray every day for our leaders to have wisdom beyond their own and endurance as they lead us through this. Pray that the love of God will shine through you in whatever situation you find yourself, and that His peace will rest on you.

Let's pray now – but don't switch off when the prayer is over, because after that, we will take communion together.

#### **PRAYER**

O God, You have always been the Deliverer of your people. We thank you for the blessings of each day that you provide for us – our food, our families, our loved ones, your presence with us in every situation we face.

We pray for people all around the world today who are suffering because of this horrible virus, but also, we pray for those who are suffering because of persecution, floods, famines – many in situations where there is no human help available.

We pray for people whose lives are so impoverished that social distancing and medical help is impossible for them.

We pray for those who are stranded on the sea, those who are stuck in countries where they can't leave – be their strength we pray, and make a way for them. But Lord we pray for people everywhere to humble themselves and turn to you for their salvation. We pray that people everywhere will come to know you as you are – the One who loved the whole world so much that you gave your only Son to give them life. Teach them, and teach us, to look for you and your saving grace in whatever situation they may find themselves.

We thank you God that you never leave us or forsake us, that you deliver us daily, that you are our healer and our hope., our joy and our peace, our refuge and strength.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Deliverer,

Amen.

## **COMMUNION**

God's ultimate act of kindness and caring was when He sent Jesus Christ to be our Saviour – our deliverer from the bondage of sin. There is no way we can earn our salvation – no way we can by ourselves come near to our holy God, because we have all have sinned. We all fall short of the righteous standards of our God. But while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. This was love – God rescuing a sinful people from their impossible situation.

Our situation without the cross of Christ is desperate. Not just desperate for six months like our situation now, but desperate for all eternity. But - now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus - the sacrifice for our sins, we are set free from the bondage of sin and death.

And what do we have to do to receive this freedom, this deliverance from the wages of our sin? Simply believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you have never trusted your life to Jesus Christ, I invite you to do that now.

If you have already trusted Christ as your Saviour, your Deliverer, then now is a good time to give Him thanks, to trust Him completely with your entire life – not only for your hope of heaven, but also with today, and tomorrow and the next day.

As you eat the bread, thank God for His gift of life through His Son. As you drink the cup celebrate the fact that our God has delivered us from the penalty of sin and made us His beloved children.

*(Pause)*

## **PRAYER**

The closing prayer today is based on Psalm 40

“May we who seek you rejoice and be glad in you;

may we who long for your saving, say continually, ‘God is great.’

You are our help and our deliverer O Lord, you are our God, do not delay.”

We, your children are waiting for you.

We pray in the name of Jesus,

Amen