



Water in the Rock
March 15th, 2020
All Saints' Episcopal Church, Atlanta
Rev. Dr. Simon Mainwaring

Water in the Rock



The Collect

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*



First Reading *Exodus 17:1-7*

From 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. The 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?" But 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?" So Moses cried out to the Lord, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." The 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. I 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. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

The Epistle *Romans 5:1-11*

Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person-- though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.



Gospel *John 4:5-42*

Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you." Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" They left the city and were on their way to him.



Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

Pandemic

By Lynn Ungar

What if you thought of it
as the Jews consider the Sabbath—
the most sacred of times?

Cease from travel.

Cease from buying and selling.

Give up, just for now,
on trying to make the world
different than it is.

Sing. Pray. Touch only those
to whom you commit your life.

Center down.



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And when your body has become still,
reach out with your heart.

Know that we are connected
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.
(You could hardly deny it now.)

Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.
(Surely, that has come clear.)

Do not reach out your hands.

Reach out your heart.

Reach out your words.

Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love--
for better or for worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.

Amen.



Have you ever wondered what it might have felt like to be Moses? Dry ground. Thirsty people. No sign of hope but a rock and a stick and a promise from God. It's important to remember when we consider the scriptures that we always have the advantage of reading backwards. We know how the story ends. Water does come gushing forth. The thirsty drink. Moses gets a break.

Perhaps now, though, at this present moment, we are more aware of how Moses might have felt. Anxious. Unsure of what the future holds. Aware of the needs of others around us, yet also aware of our own needs; aware of our own thirst in a thirsty world.

It is a somewhat strange experience to be preaching here, with just a handful of us and an unknown number of you. Whereas before I have looked out into the congregation gathered, and seen your faces, your eyes, heard your laughter and your singing and your prayers, now we are seeking to see beyond our physical absence from one another.



Perhaps some of you are now taking a quick nap, or have popped out to the kitchen for a drink, or decided that this was a good time to let the dog out the back door - things you had always fantasized of doing for years while tethered to your pews here at church! It is the strange distance of being present to one another like this, I cannot see you as you are. For, distance might make the heart grow fonder, but it also requires our gaze to look beyond and wonder for the interior of who we are; to look for the water in the rock, even in this dry land.

The wilderness is a testing place. This Coronavirus is testing us. It took the Israelites 40 years to move from that scarce, dry valley to the mountaintop sight of the promised land. We don't have 40 years. We have today, and tomorrow. We have now. The neighbor to our left and to our right. We have the present hour and the people in the midst of your life, in your home, on your street.



Yet when we look to our left and to our right, what do we see: water or rock? Do we see faith or fear? A fellow human traveler or an incubator of something we don't want. If we're honest, there will be times over the coming days when we will see all of that, and more. It is clear that this global health crisis will test us in a great many ways - our hospitals, our schools, businesses, for many the ability to support our families, and for all of us, as a society, our capacity to care for the most vulnerable in our midst. Yet, it will also test our character, not merely our capacity to endure and adapt but our capacity to love.

And so, as we rightly prepare in this city and state for a storm that may well be coming our way as it has in other parts of the nation and the world, we would do well not only to prepare in being prudent about our need to be safe, we should prepare our hearts also. We should prepare for how we will face one another, what we will offer to one another, who we will be to one another. As we hear Paul say in Romans this morning, *'For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ... proves his love for us'*. The question then remains, what will we do in our hour of weakness?



Well, if I know All Saints', I know this: that ours is a church that loves to sing. What if we were to prepare our hearts for that?

Let me paint you a picture, if I may.

It begins with just a single voice. Clear and strong, projecting down a dimly lit narrow street with shuttered windows and dogs barking. One voice, then in the darkness, it seems like a dozen more join in, high and low in pitch, some singing in harmony, all with great gusto. It's almost a defiant kind of sound. Rousing. Hopeful. 'Viva la nostra Siena', 'long live our Siena'. Words sung from the balconies of the streets of the Italian city by a handful of the 16 million or so who are quarantined in their homes in that country. *'We shine our best in the darkness'* wrote one person seeing the video online. Light in the darkness; water from the rock - it's what we're made for when we remember how.



In their hour of weakness, the Italians sang. Turns out so did the Chinese, in Wuhan Province right at the start of this rapidly expanding pandemic. And not just that. In the country where a staggering 800 million people experienced some form of lockdown to combat the virus, China also chose to look for water in the rock: a new karaoke reality TV show with famous singers taking requests and singing to millions from their homes; communities formed on *WeChat* for those who felt the burden of isolation; nighttime cries of "*Wuhan Jiayou*"—or "*Stay Strong Wuhan*"— have been heard in the city where reportedly all of this started.

Water in the rock. A song sung in the night. That is what we can prepare our hearts to do. '*Endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts*', writes Paul in his letter to the Romans. Let us pour ourselves into one another's hearts these coming days. Let us find our hope in the power of such a love.



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When we hear the cries to be less, let us be more. When we are drawn toward the temptation to fear our neighbor, let us recall how fiercely and deeply we are called to love the lives God surrounds us with. And let us trust that the One who calls us into being is faithful, and makes of us one body, no matter where we find ourselves situated today or tomorrow.

In Siena they shine their best in the darkness. So shall we.

Amen.