

Are We There Yet?
Exodus 17:1-7
September 27, 2020
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Preaching in the Age of COVID-19

May the God who Creates us...

Good Morning!

Sometimes I feel as if we are all on an extended family car trip. One that started off well enough, but now, we all really want to know, “Are we there yet?”

Ours was a military family, so cross country road trips as we moved from one duty station to the other were not unusual. We’d start off very early in the morning, what my Dad always referred to as “*O Dark Thirty*” which translates into 4:30 or 5:00 in the morning. My brother Kevin and I would still be in our pajamas. We had a rambler station wagon and this was well before we thought seat belts were absolutely necessary. So mom would lay out our sleeping bags in the back of the car, with our pillows. The car would have been loaded the night before. The alarm would go off and we’d just go from our beds to the back of the station wagon with just a quick stop at the bathroom in-between. Then we’d wave good-bye to our old house, Mom would say a quick prayer for our safe trip, Dad would toot the horn, and off we’d go.

Kevin and I would fall back to sleep and we’d wake up three hours later, always it seemed somewhere in Pennsylvania. Mom would have made breakfast sandwiches and we’d continue on our way for another 7 hours. So far so good---right? But then, well at about hour 6, my brother Kevin would start looking at me. Maybe his hand would stray over to my side of the car. Or he’d take the red crayon and use it all so that the tip was no longer sharp and well then it all came crashing down and he and I began to sound a whole lot like the Israelites wandering in the wilderness: tired, restless, cranky and not at all interested in the delayed gratification of the promised land. We were done.

And I think, that is where we are now. Most of us were willing to put up with the restrictions and limitations that we put in place to protect us from this wretched Corona virus that has now killed more than 200,000 souls in our country—200,000 people. We would forgo a portion of our lives, relinquish gathering in large groups, wear masks, and suspend worshipping in person in large groups for a while. But the “while” has gone on way too long. We are getting close to feeling done, believing that this God-forsaken trip needs to be over. And it’s not.

I’m thinking that right about now we have an awful lot in common with Israelites of old, who in today’s reading are wandering in the wilderness near Sinai. They are making their way to the promised land by stages, steps and incremental advancements. Not exactly the weekend getaway they thought it would be.

Today, they find themselves camping in Rephidim where there is no water. They are in a desert, (they've never been to the promised-land) so they don't know where it is—and this extended back country trip is getting old.

Settled in for the evening in a place that is not only lacking in milk, honey and other such Promised Land accouterments it is completely and utterly without water. They complain to Moses, God and anyone else who happens to be listening. I hear them in my head saying: "I'm thirsty." "Make him stop looking at me." "Tell her to stop infringing on my rights." "When is this all going to be done?"

"They want to know, "Are we there yet?"

"When do we get to go back to normal??"

I hear their words echo across the ages and I know how they feel. I want answers. I want more. I want the land of promise, hope and freedom, justice and mercy to be here—now.

I don't envy Moses. Dehydrated or not—these people are oozing umbrage. Have you noticed—just how disagreeable it is to be on the opposite end of someone else's righteous anger or indignation?

Want to ensure that people will avoid you for a while—take some pains to explain to them how you are right and they are so very wrong. When I go to those places, my spouse Susan always looks at me and says, "Really—what part of you, do you think, is appealing right now?"

Here's the interesting thing. When Moses funnels their ire at him on up the chain of command to God, God does not respond with righteous indignation. God does not give them a lecture about being God or chastise them for not having the big picture. God simply says to Moses, take action.

Not just any old action—but very specific—action **that skips righteous indignation and goes directly to right relationship.**

God says this, "Go ahead of the people—but don't leave them all—take some of the elders with you. Take that staff with you too. The one you first used to turn that beautiful River Nile into a current of blood. Take the staff and take the elders too and go to the rock of Horeb. I, God, will be standing in front of you as you strike that rock and the water will flow out so that the people may drink."

Moses strikes the rock, takes the action and the water flows.

Moses take action, the elders, God—all standing on the same plane. Each seeing at least one of the vital players in the drama. No backroom deals or secret shenanigans.

In a polarized world filled with fear and frustration, regardless of our wealth, race or political persuasion in a world where many of us, miss what we had and fear for our lives, and loved ones' lives, may we leave our indignation behind,—not our pain, not our sorrows, nor our fears, but may we take the action to relinquish that edge, that righteous edge that separates us, one from another and from our God.

May we, like Moses and the Israelites, have the courage to state our needs, voice our dreams, utter our prayers and then standing one with another and with our God may we seek connections, commonalities, and seek out answers and shared solutions.

One way we seek shared answers and shared solutions in our communities and in our country is to vote. We are less than 40 days from our national election. Have you registered to vote? Have you asked for your absentee ballot, have you listened to someone who will be voting differently from you and asked them why and then listened and considered their views?

In a time when so much is not in our control, listening to other people, hearing their reasons, considering them and then voting are two very real actions we can take to move all us together closer to the promised land.

In today's wilderness may we be as Moses, Yahweh and the Israelites were so very long ago, may we find comfort together, one with another, drinking the water of life as we seek together the promised land.