

Reflection on the Scripture: Exodus 17:1-7

[Either read or [watch the video](#) of me offering the reflection.]

Today wasn't supposed to be like this. Today was supposed to be the first time in my life I wore jeans to church. Please don't tell my mother I was even planning on doing that. Because we were going to be busy after worship getting the church ready for the new windows to arrive on Monday. I was supposed to be in my jeans, in the pulpit that has my reading glasses and a life saver right where I left it. I wasn't supposed to be standing at my ironing board with a file box on it and then a paper box on top of that, with my iPhone resting on a jar opener so it wouldn't slip while I talked.

Today wasn't supposed to be like this. Jane was supposed to be down in Virginia, comforting her sister because of Ray's passing. Becca and Andrew and Maddie were supposed to be in class or on Spring Break, either way, their parents wouldn't really have any idea where they were. Carol was supposed to be recruiting people to cook bacon for next Saturday's Breakfast Buffet. But none of that is happening. None of that is happening. Today wasn't supposed to be like this.

That's what the Israelites were saying. They had listened to Moses and heard him talking about the power of God, about how God wanted to lead them out of slavery in Egypt and into the Promised Land. And that sounded so good. And God was so powerful¹ that even Pharaoh, even Pharaoh and all his gods, couldn't win against the God Moses followed. The God that Moses spoke with laid a path in the sea, led the Israelites through it, and brought it crashing down on their oppressors. That's power. And that's what their God had.

It's easy to believe in God, when you have everything you want, everything you need.² It's easy to believe that God is with you every step of the way, when you're making plans and they're going smoothly and you're doing your job the way you're supposed to, with the resources you need. But when you hungry and thirsty, when you a legitimately afraid that nothing is in your control anymore, well then you start to wonder, "Is the LORD among us or not?" (Exodus 17:7).

¹ J. Coert Rylaarsdam, "The Book of Exodus: Introduction," vol. 1 in *The Interpreter's Bible: The Holy Bible in the King James and Revised Standard Versions with General Articles and Introduction, Exegesis, Exposition for Each Book of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1952), 846.

² Frederick Niedner, "Third Sunday in Lent, Theological Perspective, Exodus 17:1-7" in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A, Volume 2*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010], 74.

The Israelites had already gone through some bad times. They only had what they could carry with them. They had run out of food so God had begun to provide manna. They were walking through a wilderness in a desert land. And they were out of water. That's pretty bad. In their minds, they were thinking back to slavery in Egypt when they were oppressed, but where there was at least water to drink. They were really frightened of what came next. So yes, they quarreled with each other and they tested God. That what Massa and Meribah mean, testing and quarreling.³

So the Israelites insisted that God produce for them on demand. If God produces, then God is among us. If not, then we're on our own. God has become a means to an end, something that is there to serve Israel's own sense of self. Israel's focus is not on God, but on what God can do for them.⁴

Yes, we're in the middle of a pandemic. But we're also in the middle of Lent. Lent is the time when we step back from the gifts of the powerful systems that surround us, gifts that come with an enormous price tag, and we return to the commands and promises of God. God's way in the world is lean and precarious. God leads us to trust in miracles that the powerful had judged impossible.⁵

Not the miracle that this virus will suddenly go away. It won't. Not the miracle that people won't die. They will. People we know. People we love. I was on the phone with a church member this week and he asked if anyone in the church had the virus. I said that as far as I knew, no. That as far as I knew, everyone was sleeping in their own home, safe and sound. But chances are that someone does have the virus. Maybe me. Maybe him. We may be thirsty now. But we know it's going to get a whole lot worse in the next few weeks.

So what are these miracles that God is leading us to? Well, they are the miracles we thought were impossible a generation ago. You exposed your kid to German measles when they were little because that was the best way to ensure they didn't get regular measles later on. Tuberculosis meant you went into a sanatorium even if you were eleven and really wanted to be home with your mom. Polio meant you died. Having some other option was a miracle.

³ Carol A. Newsom, "Third Sunday in Lent, Exegetical Perspective, Exodus 17:1-7" in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A, Volume 2*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010], 79.

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, "Third Sunday in Lent: Exodus 17:1-7" in *Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV – Year A*, ed. Walter Brueggemann et al. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 202.

⁵ Brueggemann, 202.

And the little miracles from today, that a casual mention of a kid loving black beans would mean **three cans showed up on the porch the next morning**. That the keepers at the zoo would worry about the penguins needing enrichment, **so would take them on a tour of the aquarium**. That the folks at Walmart and Target and Market Basket would keep coming in day after day after day to restock the shelves so we wouldn't be so worried. That the doctors and nurses would keep showing up, even when they are exhausted and frightened for their own families in ways that the rest of us cannot even imagine.

Take a minute to think of where in your own life you might see miracles like these in the coming week. Because being assured that God is with you is going to make the coming week much easier to take. I'll give you a minute, but remember you can even pause the video if you want more time.

[Pause]

So yes, today was not supposed to be like this. We were supposed to be together, getting ready to have our little church get a major upgrade and be a safer and warmer place for us to gather and feel God's power and presence. To get ready to celebrate the fact of God's power through the resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday. And instead, we are all spread apart. And we are facing a situation which is only going to get scarier. In all likelihood, we will test God. And we're already quarreling with each other because this house isn't big enough for two Zoom meetings and an episode of Dora the Explorer. Welcome to Massa and Meribah. But if you for one moment wonder "Is the LORD among us or not?", look for the miracles that the powerful have judged impossible. Because they are there. Even today, which was not supposed to be like this. God is just that powerful. If you will only allow yourself to look.