

September 27th, 2020

Exodus 17:1-7 “Water From the Rock”

“Typological” preaching drives me crazy sometimes. That’s when you’ve got a passage of scripture in front of you from the Old Testament, but you ignore what’s going on in the text itself and go off on a big tangent about how everything in the story is a symbol for something else in the New Testament. Exodus gets this a lot. “Oh, the desert stands for sin and the manna from heaven stands for the scriptures and the quail stand for the flesh of Christ.” Because heaven forbid that we put ourselves in the time and place that the story occurs without future tripping on how to connect it to Jesus. It’s great when you do it the other way around. It’s great when you’re in the New Testament and Jesus says or does something that you have to go back to the Old Testament to see how it connects. But when you’re in the Old Testament, you need to put yourself in the shoes of the People of God who, at the time, did not have Jesus. “Good grief Jesse, why are you being so harsh about that style of preaching? Some of us grew up on that you know!” Yes. But I had Old Testament professors in College and Seminary beat typological preaching out of us.

With that being said, I’ve got to confess that I’m re-thinking my attitude. Why? Because when I run into Old Testament stories like this, I hit a road block. At a glance, this passage doesn’t have much to say other than, “Once upon a time the Israelite people got grumpy and thirsty wandering around in the wilderness. God told Moses to whack a rock with a stick, and when he did, fresh water came gushing out and the people lived happily ever after.” What do you do with a story like that? Some preachers in some traditions go for the old tried-and-true, “test of faith” method when you run into a miracle. “Do you believe that this miracle literally happened? You better! Because if you don’t? You’re putting your salvation on the line buddy!” But honestly, does it really *matter* whether we believe this “really” happened or not? What difference will it make to the way I live out my faith and practice

tomorrow? It's not likely that I'm going to be part of a thirsty tribe in the desert any time soon! But then again, it's 2020 and honestly I'm done with saying, "Oh, that would never happen!"

So what are we going to do with this? Well, let's do what we *normally* do and go back to the original audience. Rather than saying that this water from the rock event only happened in order to point to something that was to happen later, what if we looked at this story and asked, "What if this story can stand for something God often does or can do?" In other words, does this story contain a "type" for the way God works for any time or place? Then maybe we can figure out how it might mean something apart from being stuck in a desert with no water.

So how about we go back to what we were talking about last week concerning our "times in the wilderness?" I'm talking about those times when our spirits are hungry, or parched, or dry and we aren't sure whether God is even with us. But then suddenly, we encounter a "God sign" or a "God wink" that provides life-giving water. This story here in Exodus reminds us that even when everything seems hard and dry and inhospitable, springs of love and grace are there, perhaps hidden beneath the surface, but ready to break through if we listen for the voice of God and discern which rock God is calling us to knock on and crack open.

This story has been passed down over generations because it tells us the truth about what we are like and about how God operates, over and over again. So my question to you this morning is, "How has God been operating in your lives during this COVID-19, Fire, Political trauma, Civil Unrest, Volatile, Uncertain, Complicated and Ambiguous Wilderness?" Where have you received water from the rock? How has God been revealed to you?