

“The Human Condition Solved” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
March 19, 2017 Third Sunday in Lent
Exodus 17: 1-7

Prayer: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

Who do you identify with in this story? Moses, God, or the thirsty people? Who you relate to in this story probably depends on your life experiences.

As someone who has guided a group of people, you may identify with Moses. The scripture says that the people quarreled with Moses. It seems that every organization has a few folks who seemed to challenge everything the leader says. Don't you just love those folks! Can you see why Moses cries out to God for help. I know there were times when I was a manager in business that I cried out to God for help in dealing with difficult staff.

Perhaps you identify with God. Now, I know this may be a stretch for some of you to identify with God, but consider what God did for the people. God didn't seem to be too concerned about the complaints, God simply gave the people what they needed - water. The Bible doesn't say that God had any resentment toward the people, no disgust at their behavior. God graciously granted the peoples' request. I know that some of you don't judge the people you help. You simply want to help them, to provide what they need. No questions asked.

How many of you identify with the people? Since we live in the desert, some of you can understand their thirst, their concern for water. I've heard more than one story about someone going out on a hike and not having enough water. Fortunately, all the stories I've been told have had a happy conclusion. The person didn't die. You can live for days without food, but not very long without water. Lack of water is a serious situation in the desert. The Israelites had a legitimate concern.

Have you had a legitimate concern that has caused you to cry out to God for help? Perhaps from a past experience or a life situation you're dealing with now, you are able to identify with these thirsty people.

All too often when this scripture is taught it is used to point out to people that you just have to have faith in difficult situations. Too many of the commentaries I read spoke negatively of the Israelites and their lack of faith and trust in God. I think the writers of these commentaries miss the fact that these folks had a legitimate concern. Without water you die.

If we back up a bit in the story of the desert wanderings of the Hebrew people to the previous chapter in Exodus, we see that this is not the first time there was grumbling. The people wanted meat to eat. God gave them meat to eat. Quail descended on the camp. The people had all the meat they could possibly want to eat. And right after that, the people were given mana, the bread from heaven that was on the ground each morning. God met their needs so why were they questioning God's provision now? Did

the people have amnesia? Why couldn't they remember what had just recently happened – how God had taken care of them?

I've not checked the scientific evidence on this, but I have plenty of antidotal examples. I believe that during times of stress people often forget their faith and how good God has been to them. I've seen this time and again in the hospital and during times people were going through difficult situations. They may have loved the Lord, but when the times got tough that love, and trust, is doubted. I call that the human condition. It seems to me the Hebrew people were suffering from this same human condition that you and I have experienced.

How do we deal with this human condition? When you're under stress in a difficult situation, someone telling you to have more faith sounds absurd. And it is. Let's take a moment to look at how Moses dealt with this difficult situation.

First, he prayed. Moses cried out to the Lord. Yes, that's a prayer. He recognized that God had the answer and asked God help.

Second, Moses listen for God's answer. God spoke to Moses telling him how to solve the problem. Too often, when we're stressed, we think we need an immediate solution and we don't take time to wait for God to answer.

Third, Moses acted on what God had told him to do.

That's how an individual can deal with a stressful situation. How about the community that surrounds the individual? As a community, we can help others deal with their stress. We can remind others to pray. But more importantly, we can pray for those who are experiencing the stressful situation. That's why we pray on Sunday morning. And, like Moses, we need to listen for a solution from God and then act on that solution. God helps others through our prayers and our actions.

This story reveals our loving God – and why we can trust God. God gave the Israelites water for their thirst. God gave them water without judging. It's comforting to know that God loves you and me so much that God will give us what we need no matter how much we grumble. Often when I look back after going through a difficult situation, I see God's hand in the story. I see how God has been walking with me all along, even though I didn't recognize it when I was in the middle of the situation.

When I do that reflecting, I'm reminded of the foot prints poem. God carries us in times of trouble even when we don't realize it.

God brought the Israelites through the desert to the Promised Land, God will bring each of us through our problems as well. When we encounter problems, we will react from our human side like the Israelites did. That's the human condition. Fortunately, we have a God who loves us and cares for us as God loved and cared for the Israelites. That's what we need to remember.