

# Thirsty Voices

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March 27, 2011

Envision, will you, the wilderness of Sin and the Israelites journeying by the course of the moon. Sin here is not akin to sinfulness but to the Semitic pre-monotheistic lunar God Sin, whose course is said to have run across the sky from Ur to Haran, the very course Abraham and his family journeyed in the earliest of Biblical story. Abraham and Sarah, of course, are the scriptural parents of the three great monotheistic religions of the west: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Theirs is a story of starting out on a trip to one place and landing in another; leaving their homeland for Canaan and settling instead in Haran. Theirs is a story of creation as they make a covenant with the One True God who will become the God of Israel and our God.

It seems to me that today's story from Exodus is one of the great chapters in the evolution of that Sacred Covenant, and this encampment at Rephidim is one episode in the human struggle to be God's faithful and thankful people. Rephidim means 'to spread support' and it is the place in the epic wherein God spread out water to drink for the support of the people as they wandered and where Moses would later spread his arms in support of Israel's military efforts against the attacking Amalekites.

So then, this first verse might very well say, "From the worship of the moon god, the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages toward the calling of the One True God, as That God commanded. They sought support for the things they wanted in their encampment, like food and drink, but did not find the things they wanted there. In their bitterness about not getting the things they wanted, they complained to their human Leader, Moses, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt!?" They quarreled and complained. "Is this God of whom you speak really with us, or not?"

Theirs is a story of starting out on a trip to one place and landing in another; leaving their bondage for the Promised Land and ending up for a time in this wilderness place. Theirs is a story of creation as they make a covenant with the One True God who will become the God of Israel and our God.

Let's look for ourselves in their story, shall we, because their blood is in us and they are our people, and their story is ours even as ours is theirs.

The question of the day would seem to be, “Why are you dislodging us from our comfortable place and asking us to go into an unknown future that we do not fully trust?”

You see, at that moment in Rephidim, the place where they sought to encamp and receive the things they wanted, they found themselves having to choose:

- A leading pillar of fire by night or a pillow on which to lay their heads.

they found themselves having to choose

- A pillar of cloud to guide them by day or the storm cloud of tyranny under which they lived for generations.

they found themselves having to choose

- The open sky of freedom or the roof over their home in servitude

they found themselves having to choose

- The welcoming arms of a God they did not yet fully know or the suffocating walls of their slave houses.

they found themselves having to choose

- The crackle of a warming fire in the new community or the crack of the taskmasters whip in Pharaoh’s Egypt.

they found themselves having to choose

- Going forward or going back.

they found themselves having to choose

- Getting their wants or fulfilling their dreams.
- Discovering what God most wanted for their lives or settling for what they selfishly wanted for their own lives.

they found themselves having to choose

- The Land of Promise, or the Land they remembered of old.

“Why did you bring us out of Egypt!?” they quarreled and complained.

The journey is trending backwards.

Jesus had to make choices, too. And his story is our story, too. In the rather lengthy gospel lesson appointed for today, we find Jesus working hard in Samaria. He meets the woman at the well who often gets all the attention on this day in church life, and they share their now famous interaction:

Jesus says to 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.'

The journey, this time with a Samaritan woman, is trending forward and this is the part of the story that grabbed me this time around:

"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.'

The destination of the journey, begun by Abraham, continued with the quarreling and complaining at Rephidim, longed for at a Samaritan well, accomplished in Jesus, is now clear. We know where we are going if we go with Jesus and the time of choosing is upon us.

We find ourselves having to choose

- This water that will bring us thirst again, or that water that will bring us life.

We find ourselves having to choose

- The food we stockpile in our pantries or the will of God and the doing of God's work.

We find ourselves having to choose

- The pain that we know or the promise we have heard

We find ourselves having to choose

- The straight path to worldly success or the narrow way to eternal delight

We find ourselves having to choose

- The security of a roof over our head or the challenge of following that one who has no place to lay his head.

We find ourselves having to choose

- The comforts of home or the costs of Calvary

We find ourselves having to choose

- 'Thank God it's Friday' or Good Friday,
- The old adage, "To thine own self be true" or the Maundy Thursday definition of our common life that says, 'love one another as I have loved you.'

Perhaps a logician or rationalist in our midst will argue that I am presenting you with a false choice. Maybe those of us in middle and upper class America really do think we can have it all, our cake and eating it, too, as it were, pursuing our wants and presenting ourselves blameless at the foot of the cross. I think not, obviously, as I recall that when the Exodus people in our history chose self-interest over seeking God in relationship, five words most aptly described them: The journey is trending backwards.

Which way is the Church going today, as Lent continues on toward Holy week and Easter?

To what end do we raise our thirsty voices?

- Do we seek support for the things we want in our encampment;
- do we remember the good old days and wish them resurrected in their old form?
- Do we lament the passing of the day when 'everyone went to church' and wish for a full house of people from town, twice each Sunday, as long as they are our kind of people, people like us, people we can comfortably welcome without changing much about us?
- Do we think we can speak a strong word for justice without every speaking an unpopular word to the unjust?
- Do we think we can teach a gospel of peace without speaking up against the ravages of war?
- Can we call ourselves a global, multicultural church without exploring music from China and the Far East, poetry from Christians in India, communion with bread recipes from Mexico and juices from something other than Welch's pasteurized grape?
- Can we really call ourselves an inclusive church if we wait for the children to leave for faith circuit before counting the attendance for the day?
- Can we really say that we are an open and affirming church already and we don't need to vote on it, announce it, and live into it if the extent of our openness is merely to say among ourselves that 'they' can come here if they want and if the extent of our affirmation of their whole personhood is to not mind if 'they' are here? Affirmation takes words and action; unspoken, unannounced welcome is no welcome at all. I'm talking about my friends in the gay community, of course.

You see ours, too, is a story of starting out on a trip to one place and landing in another; about settling in a church community that offers us love and companionship and community and friendship, encouragement and nurture and comfort and a sharing

place, only to discover the sacred texts teaching us not only that discipleship is a joy, but that it has a high cost, too. "For those who would save their life would lose it," Jesus said, and 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.'

At the end of the day, which is the start of this day, we have to choose

- Whether this will be God's church or our church. We can't have it both ways.

"Why did you bring us out of Egypt!?" they quarreled and complained.

'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty," she said.

'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.' Jesus said.

Ours, too, is a story of creation as we make a covenant with the One True God who is the God of Israel and our God.

The journey is trending .....

Well, yes it is .... And we are writing the story even as we gather today. "Why are you dislodging us from our comfortable place and asking us to go into an unknown future that we do not fully trust?"

Ours is but one more episode in the human struggle to be God's faithful and thankful people. Let those who have eyes see; let those who have ears hear, and let us all run with faith the race that is set before us, as Lent continues and we draw ever nearer to Jerusalem with Jesus.

Thank you for your kind attention.

May God bless us, every one.

Amen.