

## Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> March 2023

All material © Heather Whyte unless stated otherwise.

God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us, we worship together in God.

Readings Exodus 17:1-7 ([NRSV](#))

John 4: 3-19, 26-30, 39-42 (taken from [the Living Bible](#))

### Reflection

When we feel afraid we often react badly towards others, our fear making us doubt others and ourselves. The Israelites are afraid, they have travelled through the wilderness and find themselves thirsty with no sign of water. We are all familiar with the story and maybe we accept the meaning without really thinking, but this story raises many questions. If, as we are told God was leading the people out of slavery and towards a new land of freedom why did he not lead them to water before they were so thirsty they became fearful? Some will look at the story and say God was testing the people rather than the people testing God as Moses asserts.

I once had a colleague whose Manse was broken into three times over a fairly short period. It was a very complicated situation with a lot of hurt and fear bubbling under the surface and we gently suggested that perhaps this was a sign that it was time to move on – calls come in very strange ways at times. Our colleague though was adamant that no, he was being tested although he could not easily explain who was testing him, but he was determined to stand firm. The situation became worse and eventually he was forced to move on. Fortitude is all good and well but sometimes we need to listen to our fears and be honest with ourselves.

Does God set tests? I am not at all sure that I can believe that. God is love, God wants the best for all people but the gift of free will means that we do have a choice and our choices are not always wise. It would be too easy to blame God by suggesting he had set a trap and was testing us. I do believe that this is story written a long time after the events it speaks of to help the Israelites understand their relationship with God, and it is the story of a journey.

Have you ever had a family event where you collectively remembered the story of a particular holiday or journey. Did you all remember the story in the same way? I am sure there would have been differences because we each remember the story to highlight what was important to us at the time. My brother and sister and I have very different recollections of some events in our childhood. How this Israelites remembered this story is significant.

Moses could have led them to an oasis – but would that have said the same thing about Moses? Moses could have discerned the sound of running water and pulled back bushes to reveal a stream, better but still not the point. No, we have to know that the people are desperate, and we have to be reminded that Moses has already done some amazing things and to witness that again. Moses relationship with God is the key feature of this story and it is a relationship into which each one of us is invited to step.

As Paul reminds his readers in Rome in Chapter 5 of Romans, adversity builds character, although I am not sure about Paul's acceptance of suffering as part of the journey. However, I can almost see him standing with the Israelites and telling them that they will be stronger because of the experience – it is not good pastoral care. The fact that suffering exists in the world is a symptom of injustice and the opposite of the hope in the kingdom of God. However, our attitude to suffering is a sign of our hope in God's Kingdom.

There are millions in the world who do not have access to clean water, and who are as desperate as we read the Israelites were, but they don't have Moses and his magic wand. Instead they have you and me, and all who believe in God. We are called to change the world one tap at a time, and we will do it in one of two ways. We can support those who strive to bring technology and clean water to remote communities around the world either through direct giving, fundraising or twinning our toilets. Or, and indeed as well, we can shout out against the injustice that people are still living without access to clean water. Every village should have a well.

It was a village well that was the setting for our story from John's gospel, and the encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan woman. In this story we are invited to eavesdrop on an interesting and challenging conversation which invites us to consider a much bigger picture. Jesus, a male Jew, asks a woman and a Samaritan woman at that, for water. This would be seen as wrong by the original listeners on so many counts, but Jesus invites the woman, and his listeners to consider the difference between water for life and the water of life. We all know we need water to live, but we also need the water that feeds our Spiritual life, feeds our souls. Jesus then reveals a depth of knowledge about this woman which even more mysterious than Moses magic wand. The woman is so astonished that she rushes off to tell of her encounter.

If the Israelites had not told their story, then our story would have been very different. We need to keep the tradition of story alive and share our story with others so that the story of God's relationship with humanity continues to grow and more people are invited to encounter God in their everyday life, sometimes in quite mystical ways. Whilst we journey towards the Kingdom there will be suffering and stories of hope are essential in keeping us strong. There is always something for which we can look back and give thanks, and then build into the story of life.