LENT 3A EXODUS 17:1-7 15 March 2020

They had been travelling for weeks. It had been over two months since they left their homes in Egypt. Two months since those heady days when the great Pharaoh was defeated without a shot being fired. How quickly the bad memories of their slavery under the Egyptians began to fade. They had almost forgotten the whips, the back-breaking work, the continual taunts and racial slurs. As time went by their selective memories drifted back to the freshly baked bread and dates and honey, and the certainty of knowing what each day held in store. Sure God had provided. Each morning they gathered up the Manna, each day they caught the Quail. But what a boring diet! Wafers and tiny birds may have been a delicacy the first time, but day after day, month after month… And now to make matters worse, they had run out of water. What was God doing? He was suppose to save them, not kill them. Was the Lord still with them or not?

**When things are going well for us it is easy to believe God is with us but when something happens that stops us in our tracks, we can very easily think God has abandoned us.** Your dad comes to see you and with tears in his eyes he says, “Mum has cancer.” Your life long partner says, “I don’t love you any more and I want to leave.” A policeman knocks on your door and tells you your child has just been involved in a serious accident. There are things that stop us dead in our tracks. Things that squeeze us so dry that we can barely go on. The Old Testament prophet Elijah had an experience like that (1 Kings Ch 18 &19). He in an epic battle and with God’s help he alone defeated the 450 prophets of Baal. He should have been on top of the world, but soon after Jezebel threatens to kill him and instead of remembering the amazing victory God has won for him, he runs away in fear. He finds a lone tree in the desert, lays down in its shade and is so desponded he waits to die. At times life takes us to dry, barren places. Places where we feel like God is no longer with us.

**God did not abandon his people instead he showed them in the dry desert that he was still with them despite the difficulties they were facing.** In the midst of the dry desert at Horeb God asked Moses to strike the rock and water flowed freely, quenching their thirst. God showed his people that he loved them and was still with them. For a while their faith was restored in God, at least until the next crisis came along. As you read about the travels of God’s people in the wilderness and later in the promised land, it is amazing how often they lose faith in God when something goes wrong. Not only do they far too easily lose faith in God’s loving presence they also tend to grumble and get angry at God. Then again often we are the same.

God is still with his people, he even sent his Son to be our Immanuel, God with us. In Jesus we see exactly what God is like. We were made to love and be loved but in this broken world the driest places are often in our most personal relationships, in our marriages and in our families. The woman who met Jesus at the well was thirsty for a real and lasting relationship. Women in Jesus’ time could not initiate divorce. Either the husband had to reject his wife and initiate the divorce or he had to die. Five times this woman had either been rejected by or experienced the death of a husband. Either way she had experienced pain and heartache five times. The current man in her life had not even done her the honour of marrying her. In that society it meant she was shamed. People would have avoided her in the street. Nobody would want to be seen with her let alone be friends with her. No wonder she went to the well in the heat of the day at mid-day when no one else would see her. She was a non-person with no permanent relationship in her life. A woman alone isolated by shame and pain, whom no one really knew.

Jesus knows who the woman is. He knows her tragedy and he knows her shame and yet he talks to her. This is in a culture where men generally did not talk to women they were not related to. Men certainly did not talk to women of dubious character and Jews did not talk to Samaritans. Jews did not accept food or water from Samaritans. Jesus breaks all the rules in order to bring life to this woman. He treats her with dignity and respect. He asks her for water, he initiates a conversation with her, he offers her a relationship, a life and the living water of his presence with her. By doing this Jesus transforms her life.

**In recent weeks we have been hearing much about the coronavirus as it spreads relentlessly through the world.** We look at the mounting death toll, the panic, the economic fallout. A few weeks ago the virus was not much more than a news item, it was worrying but wasn’t touching us personally. Now it is beginning to become personal, at first maybe you had trouble getting toilet paper then over the past week as the stock markets have fallen many of us have seen our superannuation and other retirement investments drop in value. Maybe for some this is causing anxiety and fear about the future. We may be thinking “Is God with us or not?”

**When such doubts enter our minds we can remain confident in God’s love for us.** The same Jesus who spoke to the Samaritan woman, also died on the cross for us while we were still God’s enemies. Through his death and resurrection Jesus opened up the way for us to be reconciled to God. Through water and the spirit God made us his dearly beloved children. Look at Jesus on the cross, look at your baptism and remember that you are now a friend of God. If Jesus died for us while we were God’s enemies, how much more will God look out for us now that through the blood of Jesus he has made us his friends.

**Very few people get through life untouched by times of difficulty and pain**. We live in a broken world and we should not be surprised when trouble strikes. Sometimes the troubles of the moment can so overwhelm us that we begin to wonder whether God is still with us at all. The truth though is that through Christ, God is always with us. God is always on our side no matter how things may appear at any particular moment. Instead of doubting God and his love for us. Instead of wondering where to turn for help, listen to Jesus as he says to you, “Come to me my brother, come to me my sister, I have what you really need, living water, water that will well up inside you to eternal life. Knowing God is with us and that God has a promised eternal future waiting for us, we can have courage in the face of life’s difficulties. Confident that God is with us we can persevere through the most difficult of times, growing in character as we so and filled with hope in Jesus the Saviour of the world. **Amen**

Lord, we are thirsty. Our souls are dry, our hearts are parched. Please come to us and give us your living water. Fill us to overflowing with your Holy Spirit and take away all fear and doubt. **Amen.**

Pastor Rolf Lungwitz