

Sermon: Waves of Grace and Mercy  
Scriptures: Exodus 17:1-7, Romans 5:1-11  
March 15, 2020  
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**Our Old Testament reading comes from Exodus chapter 17, verses 1 to 7. During Israelites' confusion and desperation in today's passage, God reminds God's people how their cries to the Lord were answered in Egypt and at the Red Sea. Let us listen to God's faithfulness.**

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Reph'í·dim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" So Moses cried out to the Lord, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." The Lord said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Hō´reb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Mas´ sah and Mer´ i·bah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?" Amen.

**Our New Testament reading is Romans chapter 5, verses 1 through 11. This passage teaches us that when one believes in Christ Jesus, one becomes dead to sin and the law, and becomes alive in Christ alone through faith. Listen to life-giving Word of God.**

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves God's love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of God's Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

This is the Word of the Lord

Sermon: Waves of Grace and Mercy

Text: "Go on ahead of the people... take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile... I will be standing there in front of you." Exodus 17:5-6

Grace and peace of the Lord be with you this morning. Last few months, particularly last few days has been challenging for all of us. As the world faces pandemic crisis, many changes are taking place and our lives are being disrupted. Many of us are introducing new common phrases such as 'social distancing' and 'asymptomatic transmission' to our daily vocabulary. Some of us did not know such phrases even existed few weeks ago! When the pictures and videos of empty shelves at grocery stores around the United States began showing up online only days ago, some of us were saying, 'it will not happen here.' It is happening now in our own backyard. Our lives are being disrupted in a way we did not imagine. We might not come across the path of the virus, but we already have been infected with the stress from dealing with the virus. Stress due to the possibility of contracting the virus, but also the amplification of how to deal with everyday things such as how to pay the bills, how to care for the loved ones, what to touch, when to wash hands, etc have affected us all greatly. Everything that we do suddenly requires greater attention. What used to be a nonchalant decision became potential exposure to the unknown. In times such as this, it is good to be informed about what the facts are and how to deal with a crisis, but it is also important to be facing such adversity with someone else.

Sometimes we need to focus on *who* we know, not *what* we know, and this reminds me of a story that I once heard.

A final exam for a course in Logic at the University of Texas was being administered. In preparation for the exam, professor told the students that one sheet of paper is allowed to accompany each student and that they can put *anything* on it.

As the exam begun, every student placed their sheet of paper with tiny scribbles all over it - all except one. This particular student simply laid a blank sheet of paper on the ground next to the desk and started to walk towards the door, where a friend who was studying Advanced Logic with the same professor was waiting. The student had the friend stand on the paper next to the desk and quietly asked for assistance throughout the exam. As you might have guessed, only one student ended with an A in the class.

Studying and having knowledge is important. But also knowing that you have a friend that will stand and walk with you, to reassure you, and continually whisper corrections and guidance takes a load off one's shoulders. We have such a friend in God. Today's passages illustrate that the cries of God's people do not go unheard and God demonstrates God's steadfast love for us by giving us a way to endure and move forward the crisis one might be facing.

As the Israelites started their exodus through the desert from Egypt to the promise land by following God's provision of cloudy pillar by day for a shade and a fiery pillar by night for warmth, they were met with their first crisis. They ran out of food. People started to cry out and God replied with Manna in the morning and quails in the evening. As they continued their journey and were guided from one oasis to another in stages, they ran into another crisis. This brings to today's Scripture in Exodus.

They stopped at a place that did not have water for the people to drink. By this stage in their journey, they knew the signs: what to look for and how to dig for a water in the desert. After all their searching, they must not have found any, and hence started to cry out to Moses and God. And God's reply is what strikes me this morning. Lord said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people... take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile... I will be standing there in front of you."<sup>1</sup>

God is always with people whom God has chosen. God has given us the abilities and tools to fight such crisis. God has always been our companion walking and standing with us. Not only that, as we look with hope for the brighter day and solution to our crisis, we will see how God has been faithful, for it will be a continuation of God working in, through, and around us, as God has shown the Israelites.

We all know how Israelites get their water. Moses strikes a rock with a staff that he struck the Nile to show the power of God in Egypt. Then the lifeless rock splits into two to give life, just like the Red Sea which promised death to the Israelites in the face of Pharaoh's chariots split and gave a way to life.

As we continue our journey through the Lenten season, let us focus on God's love for us. As Romans 5:8 tells us, "God proves God's love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us." If rain was like God's love for us, there would be a second flooding of the earth and we would be drowning in it. All of us have moments in our lives that can be only explained as a luck or spiritually defined as God's act of grace and mercy, regardless of how great or small. God's never ceasing love is like a wave that propels us to greater heights and allows us to move forward. Without it, we would simply sink and it would mean defeat for us.

In our current season of life, we are facing a serious challenge. God is Immanuel with us. God has already equipped us with knowledge and medicine to face the crisis. God is faithfully walking with us and guiding us in the time of confusion and the unknown. Once again, like many other crisis in our lives – big or small, we will once again get through this one covered in God's wave of grace and mercy.

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<sup>1</sup>Exodus 17:5-6