

“Rest Stop”

Exodus 17: 1-7

We've reached the part of the journey where there is no longer murmuring and grumbling. No there is out right quarreling, quarreling among the people, quarreling against Moses, quarreling against God. At this point of the journey, nerves are shot. Patience worn out. Everyone's last nerve has been reached, climbed on and strained. No one is happy. Everyone is miserable. Like any good road trip, now is the perfect time for a break. Now is the time for everyone to rest and renew. Now is the time for everyone to go to their separate corners and breathe. For the people of God, now is the time for a rest stop along the way.

The interesting thing is where the rest stop occurs. We are told that the people break camp and set out on their journey. They end up at a place called Rephidim. This place is in the middle of nowhere. It doesn't even show up on anyone's maps. Even today, the place does not appear on maps of this area. If you google this particular place, you will come across a map with a big old question mark beside Rephidim. This place is anywhere and nowhere.

All we know for certain is that it has no water. It is a place which does not, which cannot sustain life. It is desolate and barren. It is empty and dry. It is the

very place which could end the journey for the people of God. They are stuck with no way forward.

And so they begin to ask...how do we know if God is with us or not? A fair question, considering what's going on at this moment. No water. No way forward. No answers. No hope. They are lost. They are stressed. Nothing makes sense anymore. At this point along the journey where they are anywhere and nowhere, the people want to know is God with them or not? In this moment, where it looks like death and destruction have taken over, the people are looking for some guarantees, only to discover there are not any on this journey called faith.

Funny how that works, isn't it? All it takes is just one moment to remind us that we have no control over this thing we call life. Things happen with no logical explanation. Bad things happen to good people. Things we had planned on coming to fruition suddenly fall apart. At any given moment on this journey we call life, that we call faith, we can find ourselves seemingly stuck with no way forward.

Again, in moments such as these, I am not going to ask how many of us have bargained with God to get what we want. Or how many of us have told God that we would do what God wanted if and only if God did something for us? I'm not going to ask how many of us have said to God, that we would take that leap of faith if God could prove to us that it would benefit us in the end. I'm not going to

ask because again, I'm not sure I want to admit how many times I have prayed this prayer.

All of us, at some point or another, have found ourselves in a place which does not, which cannot support new life. In these dry and empty places, we become angry and frustrated, lashing out at everyone and everything. And someone or something will come along and remind us, call us to stop, to take a break, to come beside the still cool waters and find renewal, just like God did for the people of God time and time again. In surprising and life-giving ways, in ways we cannot even imagine, God finds us in these dry and desolate places and offers us the water of life to drink, just like God did for the people of God in our text today.

Please don't hear me say that this process of new life is easy or that it happens overnight. I will be the first one to tell you that when we find ourselves in these dry and desolate places, too often we would rather stay there than go through the pain of rebirth. Moving from being dry and empty spiritually, mentally, emotionally to new life is messy. It sometimes requires us to face some truths about ourselves, our lives, and what is really important to us.

Or as pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber, in times such as these, we are to remember when we find ourselves in these empty places, "Jesus didn't look very impressive when he was resurrected. He still had dirt of the tomb under nails, that for too long

the church has tidied up Jesus to make him look more impressive when in reality, what we connect to about Jesus is his authentic way of being in relationship with others, seeing them as broken and beautiful people of God. She goes on to say that she never would have signed up to work for God if she thought God was only trying to make her spiffy or good. She knew when she accepted her call as a person of faith that God has always been about making her new, reaching down in the dirt that we create, dirt made from acts of hurt, acts of broken relationships, acts of anger, God is always reaching down in these dry and desolate places bring us back to life.

You see, what we don't realize or tend to forget is that in this text the very place from which the healing waters flow for the people is a place where the people have been before. It is a place that will become part of their story. It is a place where time and time again, they will come back to as a rest stop along their journey.

This place is Mount Horeb. Of course, we know it by a different name. We know it as Mount Sinai, the place where the people receive the 10 commandments from God, the place where the presence of God passes by Moses, the place where the people enter into a new covenant with God. But...but this is also the same place where Moses received his call. This is also the place deemed by God as holy ground. This is the place where God answered the people's cries to set them free,

to release them from the bonds of oppression. This is the same place where God told Moses that Egypt, told Moses that the systems which create, which thrive on keeping others tied to the dry and desolate place, this is the place where God told Moses that these things will not have the last word. God will. And this word was, is and will forever will be a word of hope, a word of grace, a word that springs forth from the rock trying to seal the tomb.

The word received by the people, received by us at this very place will always be a word, reaching out, reaching down, and loving us back to life. It will always be an invitation to know that God is not the means of our journey. Rather finding ourselves surrounded by God's presence, God's love, God's grace is the end of our journey. In this text, in our lives just when it seems like the darkness and desolation will have the last word, God provides once more for the people of God. God provides in a manner which not only meets their physical need but also in a way that involves community, reconciliation, and wholeness for all of God's people.

When the people asked if God is with them or not, in surprisingly and life giving ways, God answers. They people are brought back to love. They are returned to the sacred ground where they first learned of the presence and nearness of God. When the people ask if God is with them or not, God instructs them to

look at the very landscape which surround them and tap into the resources of love
which are already there in their midst.