

Sunday, October 1, 2017

Exodus 17:1-17

Matthew 21:23-32

God is Present Always

Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote his longest poem, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in 1798. This poem relates the experiences of a sailor who has returned from a long sea voyage. The mariner stops a man who is on the way to a wedding ceremony and begins to narrate a story. The wedding-guest's reaction turns from bemusement to impatience to fear to fascination as the mariner's story progresses. There are moments of danger, the supernatural, and serenity depending on which part one is reading in this poem and to which area the mariner and the crew aboard his ship are sailing. There were also moments when no air movement was enabling them to sail and in these days problems arose for the crew. Nothing to drink.

Coleridge's poem reads:

"Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.

Water, water, every where,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, every where,
Nor any drop to drink.

The ship's crew are in the middle of the ocean and do not have any fresh water to drink. This poem and specifically these lines are often quoted because they describe a situation in which someone is in the midst of plenty but cannot partake of it.

As we continue our journey with the Hebrews who were slaves in Egypt and are now making their way through the deserts towards the Promised Land, we hear them grumbling again. God responded to their grumbling before and now provides manna in the morning and quail in the evening for food. But this is not enough provisions for all. Water is essential for life and these people have crossed through the Red Sea on dry land. They were able to keep hydrated for a while but now in the desert they have nothing to drink. This situation is not exactly the same as the crew sailing in the ocean, but all people involved those on the ship and those walking through the desert are facing the same problem. No water that they can drink. No water for cattle, for washing, for drinking for staying hydrated in the desert heat. So again the people

grumble against Moses, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst”

Moses cries to God and asks, “What am I going to do? They are going to kill me!” God then tells Moses what to do. He is to take elders with him and to go by a rock at Horeb. He is to strike it with his staff and water will come out. Moses did this and water came out of the area of the rock of Horeb. Water that was good and clean. Water poured out from the rock in a desert area. The people tested God and wondered if God was really with them or not on this journey.

Have you ever felt that God ‘left you alone,’ left you hanging, or left you to sink or swim on your own? It’s ok to say yes to this because at some point or maybe at different times in our lives we probably will and have wondered where God was. Maybe these moments when you were hearing about health concerns of a loved one, a diagnose of disease or progressive illness or even you felt like no one cared especially God. It was like he put you in the desert to die of thirst.

Yet we know that God was with the Hebrew people –during the day his presence was in front of them as a cloud and in the evening it was of a fiery pillar. God did not leave them alone in the desert to figure out where they could obtain the basics necessities of food and water. God provided it as they needed it. And God actually did more than this because during the battles they had with the Amalekites, God was present as long as Moses’ hands were raised. So even when Moses hands grew tired his friends kept them raised by putting a stone under him and he sat upon it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up as they sat with him side by side. Joshua’s army overcame the Amalekites. And the former slaves realized again that God was with them on their journey toward the Promised Land.

As we come together on this Worldwide Communion Sunday, no doubt there are many people asking questions around the world about the presence of God. Or why would God let so many disasters and storms occur as so many people are hurting and their lives are turned upside down? Where is God when there are so many people in need?

We read in the Psalm 47 that God reigns over the nations from His holy throne in heaven. Even though we know that God’s presence is in some sense uniquely in heaven, we also believe that God is omnipresent which means God is present everywhere at the same time. God hovered over the earth during the time of creation when it was still formless and empty, Then God filled the world with His creation, and His presence and glory still continues to inhabit the whole earth. God made this world and as we celebrate this season of Creation, we know that God would never abandon what he has made.

We also read in Hebrews 4:13, "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account." Can we really hide anywhere from God? Psalm 139 describes God's presence with us. "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there." God is with us. We are not alone.

If you believe in Jesus Christ God's Son, you know that God is with you, beside you, above you, and inside you. God's presence and watchful care never leave you. If you do not believe in Jesus Christ, God is right in front of you, inviting you, drawing you, offering you the love, mercy, and grace that He longs to give you. Perhaps a better question for many to ask rather than "Where is God?" is "Where are you, in relationship to God?"

A man applied for a job as a handyman. The prospective employer asked, "Can you do carpentry?" The man answered in the negative. "How about bricklaying?" Again the man answered, "No." The employer asked, "Well, what about electrical work?" The man said "No, I don't know anything about that either." Finally the employer said, "Well, tell me then what is handy about you." The man replied, "I live just around the corner." Sometimes the greatest ability we can have is availability. God is available to you. But are you willing to be available to Him? Are you where God can call you within whisper range of his summons for this is what marks the beginning of a life of meaningful relationship as faithful followers of Jesus.

On this Worldwide Communion Sunday, it is important to reflect upon God's presence in your life. When we share in the bread and juice this morning let us be reminded that God's Son is with us as we share this sacred meal. His Spirit is here in the breaking of the bread and in the pouring of the juice. It is in the serving and being served this sacred meal that we know God is here. Yet we will leave this place and go into our homes our community and do whatever we are lead to do this day. Will the reality of what you have done here make a difference to you as you share with others this afternoon? This evening or even tomorrow? Will knowing that what we share here is holy, sacred and of God make a difference in your life as you meet people wherever you work or play or interact? Sometimes we need to be reminded that God's love is to be carried into the world, to make the circle of Christ's family wider and to share Christ's love with people who may have never heard his name. Let us remember this as we do what Jesus calls us to do on this Worldwide Communion Sunday.

Let us pray.

God may your Spirit move us as we strive to be your faithful people. Remind us that you are always with us not only in times of crisis but every moment. We praise you for being able to share with one another this sacred meal, Jesus asked us to share in remembering him. Enable your Spirit to move amongst us as we draw closer to you and aim to make our circle of Christ's family wider each day. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen..

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