

Lent III            March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011  
Exodus 17:1-7        Ps 95            Romans 5:1-11        Jn 4:5-42

I love this story from Exodus about the people wandering in the desert. They had been freed from slavery in Egypt. God had shown miraculous power in parting the waters for them to pass through while the Egyptians and their chariots couldn't make it through in pursuing them. They had been eating manna – bread from heaven – provided for them in the desert every single day by the power of God so that they didn't starve. There's even a story of hundreds of quail landing in their midst in response to their complaint to God that all they had to eat was the manna. But now they were thirsty and they sought a scapegoat – someone upon whom they could lay all of their troubles. They cried out to Moses, "Why did *you* bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" Never mind that it wasn't that long ago that they had begged Moses and implored God to get them out of Egypt. Now, they were basically forgetting all their previous blessings and saying to God, in effect, "But what have you done for us *lately*???"

I love this story from Exodus about people wandering in the desert because it's so human. We can be such whiners. I have a warm home, a wonderful husband and family, food in the cupboard and abundant clear water piped right into my house. I can watch TV in peace at night and knit baby blankets. I can read a book – I have two eyes that see. I have friends and good work that I love doing. I don't live in Japan near a melting nuclear reactor. No one I love was in the path of that tsunami. But when it snowed 5" in Buffalo on Wednesday, I whined. "Oh, Lord, I'm so sick of this rotten weather. Can't you make it be spring? When is this going to *end*?" ..... "What have you done for me *lately*???"

It's the human condition, isn't it? It's a wonder God doesn't plunk us all down in the midst of the wilderness saying, "Here – wander around in this trackless wasteland for forty years and *then* come see me if you have something to complain about!"

But far from treating us like the often ungrateful children that we are, God is patient with us like a supremely loving parent. In the story from Exodus, when the Israelites complain about being thirsty, God gives them water – miraculously – by having Moses, their leader, strike a rock with his staff and the water gushes out.

The Israelites drank this water in the desert, but they still died because this was just regular water. But when God in the person of Jesus Christ came to earth among us, he provided us with the Living Water – the Water of Life.

In this morning's Gospel we hear the story of Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well. Turns out she's been married five times and is now living in her sixth relationship. Jesus knows all about her story – everything she's ever done – even though they are meeting for the first time. Jesus talked to her in a culture where men didn't talk to women in public. Jesus talked to her in a culture where the so-called *religious* often shunned sinners, especially in public. Jesus didn't say to her, "You disgust me and your life disgusts me." Jesus didn't say to her, "You are not worthy of my even talking to you – and don't you try to talk to me." Jesus didn't say to her, "You are going to go to hell because you're a sinner." Jesus asked her for a drink of water from the well and then he offered her something even better: the Water of Life – Living Water. He said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water [the water from the well] will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

In other words, Jesus offered to transform the desert of her life into a lush and verdant living garden of grace.

And the same holds true for you and me: Jesus has the power to transform the wilderness of our hearts into hearts filled with love. Hearts filled with love and compassion for ourselves and for the people around us. Even when we whine. Even when we act as if we've forgotten all that God has ever done for us. Even when we behave like ungrateful children. God is faithful to us. God gives us the water we need to drink to quench the thirst of our souls – the thirst for a relationship of love so deep, so broad, so wide, so high, that we can't get our minds around it.

Jesus knows everything there is to know about you. Jesus knows everything that you have ever done and still desires to be in relationship with you and to love you. That's what he's done for us lately...and will keep on doing forever.

Amen.