

## **“Water from the Rock”**

Sermon Preached by Rev. Young-Mee Park

At First United Methodist Church of Oak Park on September 25, 2011

Text: Exodus 17:1-7

When you perform certain tasks over and over again, you can expose yourself to some risks. You know, roofers can fall from the roof. Certain injury or illness is more likely to occur in a given body of workers than in the general population. We call it occupational hazard, right?

Did you know that there is an occupational hazard specific to the clergy population? According to a recent research, priests, ministers, rabbis, and imams suffer from high rates of depression, obesity, and high blood pressure.<sup>1</sup> Clergy members are generally driven by a sense of duty to answer calls for help. But they rarely find time for themselves, and, as a result, they suffer from high rates of these unhealthy conditions.

I don't know what's wrong with me, but I am not afflicted by any of these conditions. But, I have to confess, that I do have some symptoms I often observe in my clergy colleagues as well. So, I assume that it has something to do with the occupation. I don't know whether someone else used the term before me, but, after reading today's Old Testament lesson, I decided to call it "Moses syndrome."

They Israelites were on their journey out of Egypt. They were in the wilderness, a dry and hot place. And there was no water for them to drink. Or course, they complained. *"Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?"* they said. And, in verse 4, we hear Moses crying out to the Lord, *"What shall I do with this people?"*

*"What shall I do with this people? What shall I do with this congregation?"* I often hear the same words from my frustrated clergy colleagues. I never say these things myself, I do not have to, but I understand Moses' and my other colleagues' feelings, their frustration and impatience. You know, the clergy folks are the kind of people who have tendency to think of themselves as Moses, whose job, they assume, is to get their congregation to the Promised Land.

Yet, however hard a pastor works, however gifted a pastors is, I have never seen a church that made it to the Promised Land, have you? Getting the people to the Promised Land is not any individual's job. It is God's job, a job for God only! Clergy or laity, we are in this together! We are all pilgrims on the journey of faith, wandering through this wilderness, stage by stage, trying to be as faithful as possible, each step of the way.

In today's lesson, the Israelites were thirsty. They wanted water. This is a reasonable request, is it not? Water in the wilderness is not a triviality. It is a legitimate issue, not only for the people, but also for Moses. The people rose up against Moses in a near mutiny, understandably so; and Moses became impatient; understandably so. The tension between Moses and the people grew. But, ultimately, they were in the situation

---

<sup>1</sup> "Clergy Member Suffer From Burnout, Poor Health"  
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=128957149>

together. They were facing a life-and-death issue. They were up against it in their raw and deep need. What they needed was not some theological platitudes, but something concrete, the real stuff, water, which makes life possible. So, the Israelites questioned the presence or the reality of God in their midst. *"Is the Lord among us or not?"* they asked.

I am sure many of you have been there, in that desperate, painful, and lonely place. A place in which God seemed silent, if not absent. Life's challenges and stresses and unexpected circumstances are so overwhelming and so threatening that you feel completely abandoned, and you wonder where you will find water to quench your thirst in the rocky soil of this troubled life.

In our text today, 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 Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink."* God split rocks open and water poured out like a river! God made streams come out of sheer rock, that the Israelites could drink, abundantly, as from the deep!

I grew up in a country where rice is the staple food and rice paddies are found everywhere. All my uncles engaged in rice farming, which required intensive labor and ample water. What did my uncles and other rice farmers do when they did not have enough water? They looked up at the heaven, anxiously waiting for the rainfall to quench the dry soil. Not only rice farmers, the entire country looked up toward heaven, waiting for rain. Today, I am dazzled to read in our text that the God, who had rained bread from heaven, chose to split the rock to provide water! Bread from heaven, and water from the rock! Who would have imagined!

This is the God we believe, my friends. This is the God we trust. This is the God we serve. God provides water from the rock, hope from despair. God turns our wilderness into a livable land in inexplicable ways! God opens new doors in a world that has been shut down. God turns the reality of death into the stunning gift of life. From the hard rock of a failed life, from the hard rock of rising tensions and struggles, God makes the living water flow. Yes, my friends. God is faithful. God is reliable. God is the source of life and every blessing that makes life good and possible.

In Jeremiah, chapter 2, verse 13, God speaks through the prophet: *"my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water."* In John, chapter 7, verses 37 and 38, Jesus says, *"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one believes in me drink. Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water."*

Let us come, my friends, poor and needy, weak and wounded, sick and sore, anxious and fearful, struggling and stressed out. Let us rise and go to Jesus, who stands ready to split the rock and make the living water flow. Let us rise and go to Jesus, the source of the living water gushing to eternal life! Let us rise and go, my friends! Amen!