

Read [Exodus 17:1-7](#).

There in Front of You

Today's reading from Exodus 17 continues the Israelites' journey through the wilderness. They've girded their loins and gotten out of Egypt. Their leaders have sung victory songs after they crossed the Reed/Red Sea on dry ground. They've hungered in the wilderness and eaten roast quail and manna, delivered fresh to their camp each day. Every time they've cried out, God has come through with miracles of provision and protection and liberation. Just as God promised.

Yet here they are, still in the wilderness and still crying out. They should be feeling great—they're well on their way to the Promised Land! But they're thirsty. And they're tired. And their feet hurt. And it's so boring, walking and walking and walking. So they stop and set up camp for the night at Rephidim.

Rephidim means resting place, and God has led them to safety yet again, out of the desert and into a shady valley. And yet again, the Israelites respond not with joy at what God has given, but with bitterness at what they haven't got. They're stuck and they can't see what God has put right in front of them.

Now, this reflection isn't entitled, "Quit Complaining!" You know that already. So do I. Exodus 17 is not a story about "the power of positive thinking"; empty positivity can be just as toxic as bitterness. This reflection is a *Rephidim*, a resting place to pause and look around at what God has put right in front of us.

What Exodus 17 shows, among other things, is that some people feel thirst and some people feel determination. Some people see stones, rock, and death, and some people see fresh water pouring straight from the hand of God. Some people will argue and accuse. And some people will see miracles.

We are the creation of a loving, compassionate God. The world in which we've been placed is filled with beauty and abundance and joy. Even in Covid times. Even when we're sick or lonely or frustrated or broke. Even when we don't get what we want, though we long for it with all our hearts.

God daily pours out incredible gifts for us—the breath we take, the heart that beats within us, the warmth of sunlight through a windowpane, the changing autumn colours. That's who God is: source of all love. Freely given. God blesses us because

God loves us, enough to come to earth and live this problematic life right alongside us and open a way for us to eternal life. Starting now. Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is at hand” (NIV: Mark 1:15). Other translations render that passage as “The kingdom of God has come near” (NRSV) or “Now is the time! Here comes God’s kingdom!” (CEB). Two thousand years ago, Jesus laid it out: God’s reign is happening now, today, right in the middle of this broken and infuriating world. Right in the middle of our broken and infuriating, divided hearts.

Once again, an ancient story of God’s people is a story about us, too.

Some days, we are the ones who can feel only our own thirst, who argue and look for someone to blame, who see nothing but desolation, harsh terrain, and a long way to go. We get stuck. Our voices echo across emptiness as we ask, “Is the LORD really with us or not?”

Other days, we are the ones who recognize God shimmering within the gentle touch of a caregiver or the deep gold of a field of wheat stubble. We savour the taste of our morning coffee or the warmth of our beds at night and know ourselves to be beloved of God, protected, at peace. And then, we’re able to risk sharing that same love with others. We forgive a sharp word hastily spoken. We reach out to meet another’s need. We give the benefit of the doubt to someone who is doing their best, and trust God with our differences. As we do, we bring the kingdom of God to life right where we are. And right there in front of us, we’ll see miracles.

God simply asked Moses to use what was at hand, that trusty old shepherd’s rod from back when he was tending Jethro’s sheep, the same rod Moses raised to turn the Nile River to blood, and this time to use it to release water from a rock.

So which will it be for you today? Thirst or living water? Bitterness or building the kingdom of God? This is what hope is, after all: a daily decision to live as if God is real. As if the Holy Mystery of perfect love is here, now, inviting us to accept God’s love as it is: vividly present in all creation, in the person of Jesus Christ, and in our own imperfect selves. Though some days—be real—choosing to live will take every ounce of ferocious, tenacious, heart-searing hope you have. Then it’s time to ask someone to walk with you.

Want to see miracles? Step this way. Amen.