…and God Will Never Stop Speaking—Third Sunday in Lent

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Exodus 17:1-7
Psalm 95
Romans 5:1-11
John 4:5-42

As you all might know, we have been gathering for Lenten Devotions on Thursday nights, here in the sanctuary. And they've been just fantastic so far. We read long passages from Scripture, and, as a group, led by the Holy Spirit, we discuss. We've been meditating on passages from Luke about meals and home. And one person who was with us last Thursday said something very true. They were thinking out loud and they were wondered: how much from these stories, you know, like cultural details from the Ancient Near East, or from Judea at the time of Christ—how much is just lost on us, and therefore, how much of these stories, how much of the message from God's Word, is lost in translation? How much are we just not getting?

And that's a really fair question.

Because if you take all of these lessons that we've heard, from Exodus, our Psalm, Paul's letter to the Romans and even John's Gospel I think there's plenty that just sails over our heads. And often the temptation for me is to just sort of supply that information, or that context, or at least little tidbits of it that I can uncover, and then I hope for the best.

It *is* true that there's always more to discover in the Bible, in that way. Scholars will never stop poking and prodding it. Theologians will never stop interpreting it. But just, as like, regular believers, we also should never stop reading it.

And we do read the Bible—we read it out loud together on Sundays, or on Thursdays, or you can read it alone. But if we read it to try to master it or absorb it all, or memorize it, or to "finally" get it—we'll always be left confused.

But we just open it up, and—in a manner of speaking—swim in it, be in it. We read scripture not really to learn, so much as to actually encounter God. It's sort of like that feeling when you… maybe… notice that a clock in your house has stopped, but it stopped at a really special time, a weirdly coincidental time. And you stop and just wonder, hmm. Or when you're very troubled about something, worried about something, and then a song comes on the radio that seems to speak exactly to what you're going through. Scripture is meant to be just like that.

A place where you can go to hear what God is saying to *you*. And sometimes it's not easy! Sometimes there is a lot of static. Lots of weird place names and cruel and ancient customs that don't apply, or unfamiliar grammatical styles like Paul's letter to the Romans or strangely awkward stories like we have in John's Gospel.

But a good way, a great way, to start is to just be simple. What do many of our lessons today have in common? We've got water, we've got thirsty people, we've got impatient people and a very frustrated God in some places, and we've got a woman who has a life-changing encounter. Let's just start with water.

What is it? The most basic building block of life. As human beings, it's maybe our most basic and fundamental need. And yet, as our two stories clearly show, human beings don't make it themselves, they have to find it. Not having water means a quick death, and so water means life, especially for people who live in a hot and dry climate.

OK, so what could it mean that God is speaking today with images of needing water and getting water? In our story from Exodus the people have just experience amazing things done by God and God's servant Moses. They were released from enslavement by God's awesome power. They've had bread that literally fell from the sky to eat, called manna. And now they're thirsty. It's their most basic need and they don't have it, so they freak out.

So, as we're hanging around in this corner of the Bible, we can ask ourselves—What happens to us when we feel threatened? How do we behave when we feel like we don't have the things we need? Don't we get testy? Don't we quarrel with our leaders, elected or otherwise? Don't we get angry with God who we thought was going to provide for our every need? We most certainly do!

Ask yourselves this now—what do you need today? What basic thing do you not have and is making you angry at God? Our lesson from Exodus says: you're in good company, together, we're all called the people of God.

The character of God in this story responds by giving the people what they want. The people drink, miraculously. But as our Psalm reminds us: the people's testiness makes God frustrated and disappointed. Why? Is it because God is mean and unfair? Or is it because this is an image of how God's people, ie, us, don't listen.

We all probably have dozens of stories, dozens of examples of ways that we *have been* provided for—basic things, like having jobs and houses, spouses and companions, food and water, but the minute something goes awry, we say, "God, come on!" Maybe this is a reminder from Exodus, tapping on our shoulders, and asking: Are you really listening? Are you paying

attention to God in your life? Even the people in the wilderness, who witnessed great and amazing things, stopped listening because they were frightened too.

I don't think it's so much that we always need to know every historical detail, I think we need to dare to grab hold of the stories in the bible and ask ourselves: what is this saying about *me*, about *my* church, about *our world*!

And Paul isn't really saying anything too complicated. He's saying that God has every right to be angry and frustrated with a people who don't listen. But, shockingly, God is neither angry nor frustrated. God just speaks to us again and again. And the Words that God uses to speak to us we believe are all best summed up in one Word—Christ.

And when we trust God, Paul says, just like the people trusted God when they left everything behind in Egypt, then we are right where God wants us. Then God is literally *in* us, poured into us, Paul says.

And speaking of pouring things, we're back again to water, and to John's Gospel. Simply put: this woman needs water. She's there, and she wants water, that's obvious. And through Jesus' words, Scripture is saying: think about it, you need water so desperately, but one drink is never enough, you'll always need more. And so, Jesus takes this need and uses it to help us understand who Christ is. Christ is every word God has ever spoken all summed up. And this Word is like water. Water is our basic need, but God is our more basic need.

And Jesus says: "Everyone who drinks of this [regular] water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty."

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

And so, when we just hang out in Scripture, and stop trying to understand everything, then suddenly I think we get *some* things, like what this woman is saying. We see that she is saying, what we are saying ourselves every day. We say: God, please help me, I'm scared. We pray: God, please help me, my needs are not being met. But the irony of our prayers, and the words of this woman, both of us are always standing in the presence of the source of what we need. Christ is always near. The Holy Spirit, Paul says, is *in* you.

Basic needs wear out, bodies wear out. But we give out trust to a God who does not wear out, who does not give up, who will never stop speaking. All we need to do is listen.

Amen.