



Leaning into the Heart of the Holy

2016 Lenten Devotions

Monday

March 7, 2016

Based on Exodus 17:1-7

By Joanne E.K. Larson, advancement operations coordinator at San Francisco Theological Seminary, as part of the Lenten devotion series offered on the website of Bread for the World, March 2, 2016

As Christ is born on Christmas, the light of God comes into our lives. Joy to the world! Carrying light and love into the world, we start a new year with celebrations and resolutions. If we are lucky, we grow as young Jesus did, remain faithful to our baptism in the Holy Spirit, and remember that we are God's beloved children.

When he was grown, baptized, and with him God was well-pleased, Jesus was driven into the wilderness for forty days of fasting and temptation.

When our hearts are still light with Christmas cheer and the promise of a new year, Ash Wednesday reduces us to dust.

Now we find ourselves in the middle of our walk in the wilderness. Our Lenten disciplines weigh on us, or are already lost. The promise of Easter is miles away. We are in the desert. We are tempted.

Exodus 17 reminds us that we have been here before. Enslaved in Egypt, we cried out to God, were heard, and God worked through Moses to set us free. We sang out with praise! But with the song still on our lips, as we journeyed by stages from the wilderness of sin, we got thirsty. We quarreled. We forgot why we were even on this journey.

Such is the way of this world. We are prepared, we are sent into the desert, and we get thirsty. Moses is sent for water. Jesus is sent to the cross. We are sent with them.

This is the journey with God. This wilderness. This temptation. This choice.

Here is where we choose to pick up our staff, as Moses did, and work with God to bring water to our people. Here is where we pick up our cross, as Jesus did, and give

away our life for others. Here is where we come into relationship with God, as God is in relationship with us. We listen. We trust. We love. We set our people free, and in so doing we too are set free. We are led to the land of milk and honey. We are born into new life.

To know freedom we must make choices from the difficult places of thirst and persecution and injury because that is when we are tempted to reject God and forget that we are saved as we save.

It is through our Lenten disciplines, and all of our spiritual practices, that we choose to spend enough time with God to learn that relationship is the way of God's creation. To learn that love and peace and generosity cannot grow within us unless we share them with our neighbors, especially in the worst of times. We learn to choose to ask "how can I help?" when we want to shout "you're doing it wrong!" To choose to say "thank you," instead of "is that it?" To choose to whisper "tell me where it hurts," rather than walk by without noticing.

Is God among us or not? You choose.

Prayer:

Give us, O God, a vision of your world as love would make it;
a world where the weak are protected and none go hungry;
a world whose benefits are shared, so that everyone can enjoy them;
a world whose different people and cultures live with tolerance and mutual respect;
a world where peace is built with justice, and justice is fired with love;
Lord Jesus Christ, give us the courage to build. Amen.

From Women's World Day of Prayer, 1993

Exodus 17:1-7

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" So Moses cried out to the Lord, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." 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." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.