



**Mennonite
Church
Canada**

Resource Centre

Sermon

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Water from the Rock

Scripture: Exodus 17:1-7 and John 4:5-420

So, did you catch any of the Olympics? Go Canada!

It's probably a safe bet that everyone of us spent SOME time during the past couple of weeks watching the Olympics. I love the Olympics! And being a sports fanatic, I watched as much of the programming as I could. Of course, like most of you I was also glued to the TV last Sunday afternoon to watch the Canada-US Men's Gold Medal hockey game. Like many, I felt this was a must-win game for Canada. We NEEDED to win in order to maintain our reputation as the #1 hockey nation in the world. It's amazing how something as insignificant to my daily life as the outcome of a hockey game, the mere difference of three goals, can have such a profound effect on my sense of pride and my feeling of confidence. But that's for another time.

What struck me about these Olympics was the amount of complaining that took place. Every day in the recap of the day's events there was some group protesting some aspect of the games. There was biased officiating in women's hockey, Wayne Gretzky's rant at the beginning of the Olympics, the Russian frustration with unfair treatment, and of course our own figure skating judging fiasco with Jaime Sale and David Pelletier, not to mention many others.

Complaining is by no means limited to the

Olympics, there are always different groups complaining about something or other in the news or literally anywhere you go. Sometimes it seems that complaining is a part of life, our natural human response when things don't go our way. If we feel the least bit slighted, our first response is to complain

The attitude that things are never quite what they should be is actually quite pervasive —

- maybe it's someone else's fault;
- maybe something should have been done differently;
- maybe one just needs a little more of something;
- you know life just isn't fair!

Why is it that we complain, and continue to complain, yet when we get what we want we always find something else to need, want and complain about? You know the expression "the grass is always greener on the other side." In our scripture reading this morning we see that the Israelites are experiencing a major case of "the grass was greener back in Egypt."

The Israelites are in the desert in a place called Rephidim, and they are hot, tired and VERY thirsty. There is no water to be found anywhere. They have once again responded in their natural manner, and their complaining has turned to a

storm of quarreling and demanding against God and Moses. Apparently they felt slavery wasn't so bad, at least compared with freedom in barren waterless desert. Despite waiting for generations to receive freedom from slavery, when it came to paying the price they weren't ready for the rigors and uncertainty of freedom.

And so the people are grumbling and establishing fault. They blame God and Moses for "making" them leave Egypt and subjecting them to what they feel will inevitably be death in the desert.

And this is happening only a short while after the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea. It's amazing how quickly people forget and become dissatisfied.

Moses, who is also frustrated, turns to God to complain about this storm of protest from the people. He starts out by exclaiming how big the storm is. He's actually afraid the people will revolt and attack him, saying, "They are almost ready to stone me." So far he is no different from the people. He is protesting about the protesters.

But something happens to Moses that does not happen to the people. He asks God what he, Moses should do. Then he listens for God's answer. He listens, and I believe he also remembers. He remembers what had happened on the shore by the Red Sea, how his faith in God got them over the waters and the lack of faith of the Egyptians got them under the waters, drowned. He remembers how God has provided for the people time and time again. But now there is no water to strike. There is only a rock — a hot, dry, lifeless rock.

What would God do now?

I remember reading a phrase sometime ago in a devotional book that I believe fits well with this situation. It goes something like this: "Don't tell God how great your storms are, tell your storms how great your God is!"

Moses had started out by complaining to God, and telling God how great his problems were, and apparently these were serious concerns. His life was at stake. In the end, though, he is confronting a rock with the task of producing water. This is trust — to stand before the elders of Israel watching and waiting not knowing just how God will pull this one off, but trusting that God will do it, and then hitting a rock in the hope that water will come out. WOW! If this isn't a demonstration of awesome faith, I don't know what is.

"Don't tell God how great your storms are, tell your storms how great your God is!"

In our text in the Gospel of John we find Jesus and his disciples on a long journey. It is the middle of the day, and it is very hot. The disciples have gone ahead into town to buy food while Jesus is waiting at a well. A Samaritan woman comes onto the scene intending to draw some water, and Jesus initiates a conversation with her. This is not just an ordinary encounter such as you or I would have with a stranger in the check-out line buying groceries.

As you probably know from the story of the Good Samaritan, Samaritans and Jews did not get along. Samaritans were generally despised by the Jews, and they had many religious and political disagreements between them. On top of that, this is a woman, making this a taboo conversation.

No doubt it has been a long dusty journey, and Jesus is thirsty. He asks her for a drink of water. Naturally, she is immediately put on guard. She knows this man is a Jew, and that men and women do not talk in public. Perhaps she is in danger? Someone who does not observe social conventions, as was Jesus's habit, needs to be carefully watched.

Her response is initially defensive, and she objects to his request for water by reminding him of the barriers between them. Their conversation continues for a while, and they discuss a wide range of theological issues. There is a lot of symbolism and significance in their discussion. So much so that drawing a message from it could go in many different directions; Jesus is challenging the status quo, he is challenging ideas of worship, and even acknowledging that he is the Messiah. However, I want to look at this encounter from one particular standpoint, that of its effect on the Samaritan woman.

Jesus' dialogue with the Samaritan woman is one of the longest recorded conversations he had with anyone. It is a real conversation, not just Jesus talking or teaching. Each is building on the other's comments — real two-way sharing.

Through this interaction the woman comes to an awareness of something being touched deep inside her. She is transformed through her encounter with Christ and she wants to share the Good News with her community. Overflowing with living water she leaves her common earthen jar on the ground and she goes ... to spread the good news.

It is significant that she leaves her earthen jar at the well. She has been given something more than earthly water, and she no longer needs to worry about earthly toils and concerns. She has

been graced with “living water,” something that can satisfy her and cause her to never thirst again. The relevance of her earthly needs for water have been altered completely. They have taken a back seat to this new gift of life and she desires nothing more than to spread it to everyone she knows.

Back in our Exodus story the Israelites asked for water. Before that it was bread. Before that it was to cross the Red Sea. Before that it was for a release from bondage. They got what they wanted but it didn't last. Sometimes the things we ask for and receive are things we need, but still aren't the things that will truly satisfy us.

As I mentioned earlier, it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking I only need this one thing and I would be happy or my life would be complete.... “If only I had \$50 more per week, I would have enough.... If only my kids would listen to me.... If only my parents would get off my back.... If only Canada would win the Gold, that would settle it once and for all.... If only I could retire.

We must ask ourselves the honest question: Would any of these things really satisfy the deep need within me?

I doubt it. My experience tells me that just because I've quenched my thirst today, doesn't mean I won't be thirsty again tomorrow.

The Israelites encountered a new hurdle around every corner, and God provided for them each and every time. But did they learn? No! They wanted God to be at their beck and call, to become a slave to their needs, but this is not what God is offering. God does not solve our problems or provide for our needs in exactly the way we think they should be filled. The offering of living water is so much more than this. It is to step outside the reality of our lives and believe that with God nothing is impossible. With God rocks will pour water, and wells will never run dry. God is trying to tell the Israelites they must live their lives in trust. It is a hard lesson for the Israelites to learn at this point in their journey and they had to re-learn it again and again over the next forty years. To trust in God is to face the obstacles in our lives head-on: To not complain, to not even know how God is going to resolve them, only to be convinced in the power of God to do so.

“Don't complain to God how big the storm is, tell the storm how great your God is.”

This is what I like about Moses. Moses was human and scared, but Moses trusted. Moses gave God's vision and version of reality more weight than his own. More weight than even the facts on the ground. This kind of thinking resulted in the ability to penetrate the surface of reality, the hard shell, and perceive what God sees underneath. This lesson shows us that underneath what is hard there is soft, underneath what is dry, there is wet. It is how God sees things that matter. We may accept the living water offered to us in abundance whenever we want it. God's grace is available for us everywhere. But so often we don't see it because it is hidden under the surface of our rocks and our realities. Our human, physical eyes and minds, unaided by grace, are so limited that we will mistake reality for what we fear it to be or would like it to be rather than what it truly is. Only God's grace and our faith in it will allow us to cross the boundaries between reality as we see it and as God sees it. In our journey through Lent, we too walk those paths once trod by the people of Israel in the wilderness and by the Samaritan woman.

We too must thirst and seek until we find that which will quench our thirst.

We too must come to that place where we can affirm, along with the woman of Samaria, not only “You are the Messiah,” but also You are my Messiah, my Savior, my water and thirst quencher.”

We too must ask the searching questions and struggle through our own hot, dry and barren wilderness. And as Moses and the Samaritan woman did, we too must place our trust in the One who has called us forward.

We are not promised a life without need or want; we are not promised a rose garden' but we are promised that our thirst will be quenched and that the strength we need will be given to us for the journey ahead. Let each one of us know that God journeys with us through the Spirit in a place that is both God's and ours.

Praise be to God for this is good news. **Amen.**