

Forty Days

OASIS

Lent Three Video

“Why do you test the LORD?”

Moses asks the unsatisfied,
people who left slavery
feverish work, the burden of taskmasters
who forced them to make bricks without straw
to build empires from the sweat of their brows.

Wandering loose in the desert,
they were still slaves of their hearts
un-liberated in their minds and souls.

Unaware of God’s presence with them,
manna in the morning
life from hard and difficult places
water from rock—
tasting salvation upon their lips,
Deep calls to deep
as our souls cry to you, Oh Lord

Asleep to the One who made earth and its seas
Not being able to see the glory in the suffering
The hope in the pain
We strive to make sense of our turmoil and toil
And often miss waters poured out,
around us and into us
to drink in the presence of God.

As we encounter the waters of Jacob’s well
Deep echoes back
but we continue to thirst
for waters not dug from the work of our hands
to not drink from empty wells
and broken cisterns,
that carry nothingness.

Opening my eyes above these waters

I see myself
in a pool of memories
committed to filling my own cup
and sustaining my own thirst
 trying to quench a parched soul
 with one person or another
 with one thing or another
 coming back to the void and seeing myself looking back.

I have eaten bread from the labors of my hand
 threshed through fields,
 Cut my hands on thorns and thistles
 land lashing back at me
 exchanging one job for another
 labor without end
 Only to find eternal retirement
 in the same dirt that I have tilled.

The waters that call us to this place
 come from eternal springs
 flowing forth from a distant garden
 to feed fertile grounds
 that yield a harvest of plenty
 to fill desert lands
 to spring forth from the heart
 so we might do the work of the one who sent us
 work full and filling
 that sends us forward to our awaited future.

Questions for Reflection

1. In the Exodus story, even though the Hebrews had been freed from Egypt “they were still slaves of their hearts.” The time in the desert was to liberate them and show them how to live as free people. How are ‘desert’ experiences times when we can be taught how to be free?

2. As Walter Brueggemann often says, Pharaoh's empire was one of scarcity. The Hebrews had to learn how to trust in the abundance of God's provision. Even the manna that God provided could not be stored and saved.¹ How can we learn to live trusting in God's provision?
3. Often, the longings of our hearts turn into complaining. In what ways do we miss seeing God's provision and presence around us?
4. How do we often "drink from empty wells/ and broken cisterns, /that carry nothingness"? What practices, habits, and patterns in our lives do we often return to, but do not yield what we want?
5. The verses that say, "I have eaten bread from the labors of my hand/ threshed through fields, /Cut my hands on thorns and thistles". Recall the curse in the Garden of Eden. How do we often make our work a difficult labor, instead of a fulfilling vocation?
6. The poem ends by inviting us to drink from waters that "come from eternal springs." How might we quench our thirst from these waters, even in desert places?

Practices of Lent

We create patterns in our lives. Sometimes these are good patterns that become traditions, rituals and habits and help deepen the flow and rhythm of our lives. At other times, these patterns are unhealthy ways of relating and being. They could be in the form of addiction to substances or they could be relationships that we often return to or abandon. Whatever these bad patterns are, creating them does not get us what we need (although we often we insist that they do). That is why we consistently return to them.

The prophet Jeremiah criticizes his own people, the Kingdom of Judah, for their unhealthy patterns of being:

for my people have committed two evils:

¹ Walter Brueggemann, "The Liturgy of Abundance, The Myth of Scarcity," (<http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=533>)

*they have forsaken me,
the fountain of living water,
and dug out cisterns for themselves,
cracked cisterns
that can hold no water.²*

However, many of us return to these drinking vessels to find that they do not satisfy our thirst. Members of Alcoholics Anonymous often define insanity as “doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.”

However, many times this insanity is so deeply ingrained in us that we don’t realize it. We see ourselves as victims of bad luck. To fully comprehend our patterns of behavior is to have a level of self-awareness that some of us might not be willing to attempt to grasp.

The good news is not that we can achieve a complete level of self-enlightenment. Rather, the hope is that God continues give us opportunities to drink deeply of the source of life. Every day, we are given the chance to engage with the divine, to experience wholeness and healing, so that we could choose to stop seeking things that will not satisfy our deep longing. How might you make space for this divine encounter to happen? What ways can you become more open to God’s provision and presence? Who might be the people who can help you come to realization of your patterns of behavior? Who could lovingly call you on what might be self-destructive? May you come to drink from the fountain of life.

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² Jeremiah 2:13, NRSV