

“Solid Rock”

Our Scripture from Exodus is part of the story of how the Israelites fared during their travels toward the Promised Land following their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. It was not an easy journey because they did not have airplanes, trains, automobiles or motorcycles. Their trip ended up taking 40 years, supposedly as punishment for their unfaithfulness to God. During all of that time, they endured many hardships. They were in great need of food and water. They were in constant danger from snakes and other wild life, as well as, from hostile natives of the lands through which they traveled. Today’s Scripture describes one of those occasions when they were in great need – for they were without enough water.

All people have had some experiences of hardship. You and I have suffered, perhaps even in the present. Some folks find themselves in constant need and often feel imprisoned by their dire circumstances. Trusting in God’s Love and Help has been and continues to be a great source of hope, encouragement, and relief. **Do you have faith – trust in your Divine Parent’s Love and Support during your difficult experiences?**

The hardship, which was being endured by the Israelites in our Reading, reminds me of other groups of persons, who have been undergoing great suffering during the last few months. **Can you think of any?** What about the victims of wildfires? What about the parents and children, who have been separated by our government, as they sought asylum – to escape the great violence and danger they faced in their home nations? Yes, some may think they deserved it, since they entered our country illegally. However, many of those immigrants seeking asylum only tried to enter at a non-port of entry, after they were repeatedly told the port of entry was closed to them because there was no more room. The Israelites were illegal immigrants brought forth to enter into the Promised Land at the direction of God and the Almighty’s Deliverer, Moses. Remember, **Pharaoh and his army had chased the Israelites into the Red Sea to stop them from illegally leaving Egypt and their slavery.**

Further, a Federal Court Judge has found that the government had illegally separated the children and parents of those immigrants seeking asylum and has ordered the Federal government to reunite them. Unfortunately, the authorities have not fulfilled that court order because they did not plan to ever reunite the families when they implemented their separation. Of the several thousands of children and parents, who were separated by the government, a sizeable number of them have still not been reunited. In the Federal Court Conference on Friday, the government’s proposal for the solution to the problem of reuniting about 500 parents with their children was rejected by the judge.

“In addition to the 410 parents who’ve been deported, the government has yet to locate 68 parents released into the United States.” Continuing, “U.S. District Judge Dana Sabraw told Department of Justice lawyers he found their submission ‘disappointing.’” ... “The reality is there are still close to 500 parents that have not been located.” **“All of this is the result of the government’s separation, and then inability and failure to track and reunite,” Sabraw said. ‘For every parent who is not located, there will be a permanently orphaned child. And that is 100 percent the responsibility of the administration.’** (“The government hasn’t found 410 migrant parents deported without their kids” by Emma Platoff on Aug. 3, 2018 with The Texas Tribune)

At least those separated parents and children now have a Federal District Judge working to bring them some justice on their situation. The Israelites could only go to Moses and his brother Aaron for relief. They were prohibited from going directly to God. What about you and me? How do we get relief when our hardships and sufferings are too crushing? **How are we to be the way someone else experiences such deliverance?**

It might be helpful for us to take a closer look at our two Scriptures – Psalm 18:1-3, which I used in the Children’s Time, and Exodus 17:1-7. First, the story about the people receiving water from the rock actually has two different versions – the one from Exodus and another found in the Book of Numbers. Although the authors of both texts intentionally want the audience to see the story to be a rebuke of the complaining of the people, the reports of what God did reveal a different message. **We are told in the Exodus version, verses 5-6, “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Take some of the leaders of Israel with you, and go on ahead of the people.**

Take along the stick with which you struck the Nile. I will stand before you on a rock at Mount Sinai. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.’ Moses did so in the presence of the leaders of Israel.” Although Moses complained about the response of the people to their lack of water, let’s note God did not criticize the people, instead, the Almighty told their Leader, Moses, how to fulfill his responsibility for the people’s welfare. Unfortunately, other leaders, also seem to need God’s instructions for fulfilling their duties.

It was not the suffering victims, who led God to be unhappy, instead, it was their Leader’s failure to fulfill his responsibilities. The version of the story found in the Book of Numbers made that very clear. **The story is not too different in Numbers 20:7-9, except, Moses was supposed to speak to the rock, instead of hitting it. Verses 7-9 state, “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Take the stick that is in front of the Covenant Box, and then you and Aaron assemble the whole community. There in front of them all speak to that rock over there, and water will gush out of it. In this way you will bring water out of the rock for the people, for them and their animals to drink.’ Moses went and got the stick, as the Lord had commanded.”**

However, there was a big difference in Numbers’ account of what Moses went on to do and what Exodus stated. **Numbers 20:10-12 states, “He and Aaron assembled the whole community in front of the rock, and Moses said, ‘Listen, you rebels! Do we have to get water out of this rock for you?’ Then Moses raised the stick and struck the rock twice with it, and a great stream of water gushed out, and all the people and animals drank. But the Lord reprimanded Moses and Aaron. He said, ‘Because you did not have enough faith to acknowledge My Holy Power before the people of Israel, you will not lead them into the land that I promised to give them.’”** Moses did not do as God commanded. Instead, he tried to use God’s Power for the People as a way of controlling the people’s expectations of himself. Moses and Aaron were promised punishment for that and, indeed, they were not permitted to enter the Promised Land.

So, what is the real message God wants you and me to perceive from the event found in both Exodus and Numbers? Instead of it being “don’t complain to your leaders or God when you are in great need”, we are to trust – have faith God’s Love and Help are always with us in both those dark and difficult times and when we experience joy and feel blessed by our Divine Parent!

Emphasizing that, let’s remember God promised Moses, **“I will stand before you on a rock at Mount Sinai.”** The water coming forth from the rock was not merely a miracle – it was an important expression of God’s Trustworthiness – of our Creator being our Solid Rock when we face great difficulties! As we experience our own hard times and God’s Loving Comfort, how shall we respond? Yes, let our Faith deepen and grow – let us praise God’s Trustworthiness and Love!

Supposedly, Psalm 18 was a song through which future King David praised God when he was protected from King Saul’s efforts to kill him. **Yes, we can join David’s praise in verses 1-3, “How I love You, Lord! You are my Defender. The Lord is my Protector; He is my Strong Fortress. My God is my Protection, and with Him I am Safe. He Protects me like a Shield; He Defends me and Keeps me Safe. I call to the Lord, and He Saves me from my enemies. Praise the Lord!”**

Additionally, our Divine Parent has shown us through God’s Own Son – the Divine’s Agape Love for all people that we are called to follow Jesus’ example of revealing and being God’s Agape Love and Help for anyone, who is in distress, especially the weak and powerless – like the immigrants, who have been separated from their children and parents. We are to be God’s Love and Help through our advocacy on their behalf and through our acts of love toward them. We are to share with them and all people in need our own joyous and faith response, **“God is Good - all the time, and all the time - God is Good!”** Amen.