

***“Abundant Living, Living Water”***

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Third Sunday in the Season of Lent, March 23, 2014

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Holy Scriptures: Exodus 17: 1-7 and Romans 5: 1-11

**Exodus 17: 1-7**

*Water from the Rock*

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?’

## **Romans 5: 1-11**

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

### Sermon

*Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary*

*Pure and holy, tried and true*

*With thanksgiving, I’ll be a living*

*Sanctuary for you*

### **Living Sanctuaries**

Today's praise music and offertories

are being led by Stephen and Meredith Westbrook.

Stephen and Meredith grew up in this and neighboring Disciples congregations.

They are also leaders in our Regional Church's youth and camp ministries.

Thank you, Stephen and Meredith, for your presence and servant leadership.

We are also grateful for our fabulous Christian Youth Fellowship  
and our dedicated – and ever so patient – Youth Advisors.

We deeply appreciate our young people in this faith community  
and around the city.

Never in the history of the world has it been so difficult to be a  
young person.

And yet the Good News is that our youth teach us much  
about caring, giving, serving, and loving.

It is no small thing that our Christian Youth Fellowship takes the  
point

to serve food and distribute health care kits

to hundreds of families of all shapes and sizes in  
downtown Atlanta,

a mission funded by our Chalice Thrift store.

It is no small thing that they make the effort

to stuff plastic eggs with candy and hide them

where neighborhood children can find them Easter  
Sunday morning.

This Easter Sunday we're releasing  
butterflies!

It is no small thing that every Advent our youth take brief breaks

from selling Christmas Trees and Wreathes on the church  
lawn

in order to rehearse and then present to the glory of  
God

yet another original Christmas Pageant,

It is no small thing that they are active and engaged

in church camps and Youth Activities Council ministries of  
the Georgia Region.

When our young people gather at camp and here in worship to sing  
"Sanctuary"

they and we mean it;

they and we live it; they and we embody the words,

*"Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary..."*

**Living Sanctuaries**

Not every community of faith is so richly blessed.

The word on the street is that there are actually folks in houses of worship

who quibble and quarrel, who get petty and petulant,

who forget and neglect the One from whom all blessings come.

Sometimes when life gets difficult or challenging,

when sufferings and scarcity abound

even the best-intentioned Christian folks can get to being ornery.

I heard tell about a young soul in a rural church

not too far from around these parts who decided he didn't care for his lot in life.

This young man lived with his family way out in the country.

His family had no indoor plumbing so they made do with an outhouse.

The latrine was hot in the summer, cold in the winter, and most always smelly.

The outhouse was located near the creek.

After a spring rain, the creek swelled and overran the banks.

So the boy decided on an impulse that since he didn't care for the outhouse

he would push it into the water.

Later that night his dad said they needed to make a trip to the woodshed.

The son knew “trip to the woodshed” meant punishment.

He asked his father why, to which his dad replied,

*“Because someone pushed our outhouse into the creek,  
and I think that someone was you. Was it?”*

The boy admitted that it was, and added,

*“Remember when George Washington's father  
asked him if he had chopped down the cherry tree?  
George Washington didn't get into trouble because  
he told the truth.”*

“That is correct,” his dad said.

*“However George Washington's father  
was not in the cherry tree when he cut it down.”*

## **Living Sanctuaries**

This Lent we are exploring together

what it means in our day-to-day existences

to live into God's abundance.

You know, we think we are examining the Word

on how to foster a spirit of generosity and gratitude

when in fact the Word is examining us,

calling out to us to believe that there is  
enough.

There is, in fact, more than enough.

The Word calls out to us to be grateful and aware of the many  
blessings God provides.

God provides for whatever God creates.

And did God create you in the image of God?

And did God proclaim that you and all of creation are good?

And did that blessing shape your world view and life?

Often it seems that our world, our culture, and sometimes even our  
church

get all caught up in fear of scarcity.

We can act so afraid.

The world insists that we hoard whatever we have,

that we hold on and hold back and hold off from being  
generous.

This is nothing new.

Consider what happened in the wilderness,

soon after Moses and Aaron and the Elders

led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and toward the  
Promised Land.

They stepped out on faith, trusting in the promise of God.

They became living sanctuaries, carrying the Word into a new  
world.

In Exodus 16...

*2 The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup> The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."*

*4 Then the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day." (Exodus 16: 2-4)*

In Exodus 17...

*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.'*

Manna from heaven!



Bread for the journey!

Fresh water from a rock!

Living water for the thirsty!

Food and drink for body and soul!

Instead of death, life; instead of loss, hope!

Their Exodus journey is our story.

Here in the Holy Bible is our living testimony

to the abundance of God's providential care.

Someone could make the point that God sure does care

for seemingly ungrateful children that most parents would have put in Time Out.

Yet that's the point, isn't it?

We are seemingly not worthy by our actions and behavior,

yet God loves us and redeems us anyway.

What was it Paul said?

*"God proves God's love for us  
in that while we still were sinners  
Christ died for us." (Romans 5)*

### **Living Sanctuaries**

Christ died for us, and that makes us worthy.

Christ's love makes us forgiven and forgiving.

Christ's grace is sufficient for this and all situations and circumstances.

Sprinkled throughout our Exodus story is the refrain

that God hears the groaning, the suffering, the hunger and thirst of God's people.

God hears and God always responds.

We see this throughout the Bible and in our own communities.

Despite the shortsightedness of Jesus' disciples,

the quarrelsome nature of Moses' neighbors,

and the fear of scarcity in Christ's Church,

the Lord provides.

The providential care of God is brought to light

by the miracle of food and water and grace

that seemingly appear from out of nowhere,

and we are never the same.

Living Water is cosmic.

Living Bread is transformative.

Living Sanctuaries are transcendent.

The Living God changes families, attitudes, behaviors, and cities...through us.

Like Jesus Christ feeding his followers in the Lord's Supper,

“the food is emblematic in that, while it feeds a present hunger,

it also fills a deeper need which transcends present

appetites.”

(Texts for Preaching, P. 489)

## **Living Sanctuaries**

Someone shared that while he was a college student

some classmates sought to convert him to become a Christian.

He pointed out the follies and faults and fallible nature of the Church.

They responded, “*Don’t look at the Church! Look to Christ!*”

He found that to be a very sad statement,

because the Church of Jesus Christ is the Body of Christ in the world.

We are Living Sanctuaries.

In due time this young man discovered both his faith in Jesus Christ

and a divine calling to serve and love the Church.

As we reflect on the challenges and joys of being Living Sanctuaries,

as we receive our weekly fill of Living Bread,

as we drink deep from Christ’s wells of Living Water,

may we reflect on what we project to the  
world.

Remember that what you win souls with  
is what you win them to.

Foster an attitude of gratitude.

Be grateful for the abundance of God's providence.

Generate within your mind and spirit a sense of generosity and joy.

Do so, and you will find it amazing, a miracle, a divine gift from  
above and within

how what once seemed so all encompassing and engrossing  
becomes suddenly small in comparison to the  
redeeming love of God.

Miracles abound, and are in abundance.

Manna from heaven!

Water from a rock!

Reconciliation from brokenness!

Forgiveness from sin!

Life from death!

**Living Sanctuaries**

One day our beloved Peggy Norton handed me a card with a quote by Charles Swindoll.

I appreciate the note (and the spirit with which she shared it!).

Charles Swindoll said:

*“The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life.*

*Attitude, to me, is more important than facts.*

*It is more important than the past, the education, the money,*

*than circumstances, than failure, than successes,*

*than what other people think or say or do.*

*It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill.*

*It will make or break a company... a church... a home.*

*The remarkable thing is we have a choice everyday*

*regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day.*

*We cannot change our past...*

*we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way.*

*We cannot change the inevitable.*

*The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have,*

*and that is our attitude.*

*I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me*

*and 90% of how I react to it.*

*And so it is with you...*

*we are in charge of our Attitudes.”*

Whether we are in the wilderness at home or work,

whether our bellies or souls are hungry or thirsty, hot or cold, afraid or lonely,

God comes to us in the Body of the Church of Jesus Christ

with a Word of comfort and a helping hand.

Do you believe that?

Do you believe that that is what we do and are?

Are we Living Sanctuaries, carrying within these holy temples a sacred Word,

sufficient grace, and outstretched hands extending hospitality and hope?

Share and be the Good News of Jesus Christ,

even if and when it means overcoming the world.

Mother Teresa wrote on her wall

(and I'd bet anything she didn't get taken to the woodshed for doing it):

*“People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered.*

*Forgive them anyway. If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives.*

*Be kind anyway.*

*If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies.*

*Succeed anyway. If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you.*

*Be honest and sincere anyway. What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight.*

*Create anyway. If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous.*

*Be happy anyway. The good you do today, will often be forgotten.*

*Do good anyway. Give the best you have, and it will never be enough.*

*Give your best anyway. In the final analysis, it is between you and God.*

*It was never between you and them anyway.”*

## **Living Sanctuaries**

Some people can be four square in the midst of Living Water and still thirsty.

Love them anyway.

Like the time a woman and her grandson were at the beach

He was playing in the water when all of a sudden

a huge wave appeared from nowhere

and crashed directly over the spot where her  
grandson boy was wading.

The water receded and the boy was nowhere to be found.

He had vanished.

She lifted her hands to the sky and cried, *“Lord, how could you?”*

*Aren’t you proud of me? Have I not been a wonderful  
mother and*

*grandmother? Have I not given to my church and bought  
Girl Scout cookies?”* A few minutes later another huge wave  
crashed on the beach.

As the water receded, the boy was standing there,

smiling, splashing around as if nothing had ever happened.

A loud voice boomed from the heavens,

*“Okay, okay, I have returned your grandson. Are you  
satisfied?”* She looked down at her grandson then she looked up  
and said, *“He had a hat!”*

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!*