

“Globally Given Gifts”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts
October 1, 2023 - Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost - Proper 21

[Exodus 17:1-7; Matthew 21:23-32](#)

Have you ever seen water springing out of a rock like the Israelites from today’s lesson from Exodus did? I have, and it was something to behold. My two brothers live in the Show-Me State of Missouri, and when visiting one time, my oldest brother and his family showed me (and Christine) the spectacular Alley Spring, from which gushes daily millions of gallons of water of azure blue, colored by the dolomite rock from which it springs. The spectacular sight is but one of over 4,000 springs in the Show-Me State, with the largest, the appropriately named Big Spring, producing, on the average day, 279 million gallons of water!

I wonder if anything like that gushed forth from the rock that Moses struck somewhere out in the desert. Perhaps not, but whatever came out of the rock seemed to be enough to keep the grumbling Israelites and their livestock alive in an otherwise

dry land. Echoing the story we read last Sunday of God providing manna and quail for the Israelites to sustain them as they journeyed through the wilderness, this reading reinforces the point that even when life for the Israelites seemed impossible and hopeless, God miraculously provided what was needed to sustain them.

Fast forward 13 centuries or so to the time of our gospel reading, we find some of the descendants of the Israelites, Jewish religious leaders, arguing with Jesus about what was springing forth from him. The reading follows the story in the gospel of Matthew of Jesus overturning the tables of the money changers in the temple in Jerusalem, thus challenging and disrupting a system that brought wealth and power to the religious leaders at the expense of the many pilgrims who came to the temple from afar to offer sacrifices. The leaders questioned Jesus, demanding to know who authorized him to disrupt the temple activity. In the common style of a Jewish teacher of his day, he answered their question with a question: Who

authorized his cousin John to baptize people in the Jordan River? The unsaid answer is that God authorized John to baptize, just as God authorized Moses to lead the Israelites away from Egypt and to use his staff, a symbol of authority, to strike the rock for water to flow from it, just as God authorized Jesus to challenge those of his day to turn over any of their lifeless religious traditions and to return to faithfully doing the work that God willed for them to do.

The call of Jesus to simply do God's will was offered to all. It was given to those esteemed by the people -- those who held lofty positions of leadership in the temple -- and it was given to those who were despised and disrespected -- the tax collectors and prostitutes. Jesus' message, that life would come to all who would follow this teaching, no matter who they were or where they were on life's journey, was a wonderful gift to those who were told by their leaders that they were excluded from receiving God's grace because of who they were. Jesus' words were like life-giving water springing forth

from a rock to those who were spiritually parched and living in a dry wilderness of the soul.

Today, on this World Communion Sunday, we join with Christians all around the globe in receiving the sacrament that reminds us that the words and work of Jesus gave life not only to the needy in spirit of his day, but that Christ's life still gushes forth today for us and all our siblings in faith all around the world, no matter the language they pray and sing in. We are all united in receiving this heavenly gift of life from Christ, we are all sustained by it as we go about our own journey, and from it we united in our calling to be the living hands and feet of Christ, continuing the work of Christ throughout the world.

Will you receive God's amazing grace, God's globally given gift, and be nourished and sustained by it?

Will you let Jesus overturn the things in your heart that keep you from simply following his ways of living in love? Will you quit questioning the authority of Christ to guide you to living in the way he desires? Will you do your part as part of the

Body of Christ in the world, to share with others the grace you have so freely received?

Friends, God's love and life are abundant and gush out to each of us in a stream mightier than the flow from the biggest of springs. Let us believe it and receive it, that God's grace may transform us, and that the world might be changed through us.

Amen.