

**St. Andrew's Episcopal Church  
The Rev. Barbara Hutchinson  
Third Sunday of Lent – 3/23/14  
Sermon**

I believe scripture is written to invite us into God's unfolding salvation story. We are integral to this process for with each story offered to us, we can find ourselves therein.

So I want to know, where are you in our exodus story we heard this morning?

Here are a couple of possibilities for you to ponder.

Are you the murmuring and grumbling Israelites? Are you the ones who consider the problems and deficits first, focusing on your immediate needs, rather than embracing the freedom you have already been given? Do you somehow expect God to show up at your very whim? Satisfy your every need in order to prove God's trustworthiness? Is there a nagging sense of entitlement that creeps into your soul from time to time?

Are your throats parched with a thirst, and whatever is given doesn't really satisfy you? No matter how much God may give you, you can't see that it's from God, and therefore you only seem to crave more?

You and all us may wonder, if God misses a beat, if God doesn't make the life we want to happen, happen for us, without undue hardship or worry, is that God really worthy of our trust.

I bet each one of us, at some time in our lives, have been like these Israelites, whom I would categorize as the greedy and non-satiated Israelites, who only wanted more as God gave more, and never offered thanks.

Or are you Moses, the shepherd of God's flock, who quite honestly is getting really tired of hearing the complaints, and who turns to God for help, and awaits for God's answer, which of course is given and enables him to provide for the physical needs of his people. But the question that has always fascinated me about Moses in this story is, did Moses always have the power to bring water from the rock, to meet the needs of God's people before him, but hadn't claimed his role as God's intercessory, hadn't trusted in God's empowerment of God's people here and now, and hadn't really believed he and his gathered people could live out of and be sustained by the freedom God had given them in the passage through the Red Sea. Did Moses not trust enough, as the Israelites had not.

Or you could be God in this story, who either is extremely patient, listening again and again to people's somewhat petty complaints, yet not seeing them as being a negative thing, but merely being invitations for God to show up persistently and

consistently, to see the murmurings as an engagement in a relationship which will take time to nurture, but in it's due course, will yield to real trust.

There are probably a lot more possibilities of how you will fit within this story today.

You may be the few Israelites, perhaps like Miriam, Moses' sister, who danced and sang with joy at their crossing of the Red Sea, who was sustained by this experience and who continued to live into the freedom offered to her by God. .

Or you could be the impatient God who said, "Would you just relax and be still and know that I am God." Period.

There are many possibilities of who we can be in the story and how we can relate to the myriad of emotions and truths contained therein.

Wherever we find ourselves, I hope we will see this story as an invitation to do what the Israelites were not able to do. They did not bend the knee of their hearts at their already given salvation. They did not give thanksgiving to God for all that God has done in their lives. They always wanted more. This is the source of their thirst and their misery~ their lack of gratitude.

And without gratitude, there simply cannot be joy.

Trust in God enables, empowers, amplifies, and generates gratitude in our hearts. And gratitude, thankfulness, awe of God, and appreciation for God's presence each moment in our lives offers us joy.

If you're not feeling joy, if you're not feeling gratitude, you may not be truly trusting in God.

So how do we trust God? Sometimes it's really hard, for that means we must to some degree trust ourselves to be worthy of God, or trust those with whom we are in relationship to hold the glory of God with us, or ultimately to trust a God, who at times can seem very intangible.

Maybe this moment of trust in God happened to you in an incredibly profound moment of grace, when there was not a shadow of a doubt that God showed up exactly when we most needed God, in a way which inspired us to instinctively cross ourselves because we were so aware of the real presence of God in our lives that our only response was to give thanks to God. We learned in that moment, God is worthy of our trust, and our only possible response was gratitude, and our hearts filled with joy. Sometimes this does happen in a watershed moment of our lives.

And other times it takes God showing up in little ways over and over and over again in our lives until we are finally convinced. Sometimes it happens this way because we find it hard to believe that God would actually be interested in showing up in our

lives, that somehow we were unworthy of God's loving attention, or that there was so much suffering in the world, why would we ever imagine God would bother with us. When I served the parish in Long Island, there was a truly remarkable woman in her 80's, who had one of the most difficult lives of anyone I've ever known. She was also someone who always wanted to come and meet with me before our women's prayer group. For weeks she would come and tell me of the hymns which would suddenly appear in her head. Often she awoke hearing a familiar hymn. And she would talk with me about how that hymn was often exactly what she needed to hear in that moment, whether it was an old favorite which gave her comfort, or one which produced joy in her heart, or one which drew her patiently into a harder part of life. After hearing her puzzlement and joy in receiving these hymns on a regular basis, I asked her if she thought these were messages from God, which in my mind, clearly they were. She was completely astonished at the notion. She looked me squarely in the eyes and said why me? Why would God be interested in showing up in my life? My response was, Margaret, why not you? Don't we believe in an incarnational God? Don't we believe God is intimately involved in our lives? Why would it be such a shock to know that you are worthy of God's revelation? The realization of Margaret that she was worthy of God's attention shifted her from puzzlement to gratitude to complete bliss and joy. God loved her, God entered her life, and God was the source of her joy.

This is not unlike our gospel story of the woman at the well. This is definitely one of the times we need to peer around the corner of the scripture text and look at not only what is said, but also what is obviously not said. In the dialogue exchange between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, when Jesus clarifies the woman's statement that she has no husband, in that she has had 5 husbands and the man she is living with now is not her husband, and she comes to the startling recognition that she has been talking with the Messiah, she leaves her bucket and runs to the village with the news: "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!" Yet I ask you to notice the unfinished nature of that sentence, especially given what we know about the woman's history: Come see a man who told me everything I ever did ... and the part not said but deeply implied is: and he loved me anyway! She does not say the last four words, but they are implicit in her action, and in the joy with which she runs. Everything she ever did is a long list of sins, and common knowledge besides; it is always before her in the judgmental expressions of her neighbors. For Jesus to have intimate knowledge of that list is not as singular as it might be; but for him to know her past, and still love and forgive her ~ well that is as unbelievably new and fresh as anything she has ever heard! The man who told her everything she ever did - and loved her anyway, is what saves her life. In that moment, she sees and trusts God. She receives Christ in gratitude~ and leaps up to tell the world. She is joyful, because she is grateful. She is grateful because she trusts Christ who knows her and loves her anyway.

May we be as she is ... trustful, grateful and joyful.

For when we are trustful, we are thankful,  
when we are thankful, we give back  
and when we give back, we are joyful.  
We taste the living water, and we never thirst again.  
This is what our spiritual journey is all about.  
Not being happy, but being joyful  
that God is a part of our lives  
and we experience the joy of returning a portion  
of what God has given us  
to the bringing in the kingdom of God.

Sometimes we start from trust,  
and move to gratitude to joy, like the woman at the well.  
She recognized and trusted  
that man asking her for a drink of water to be the Messiah,  
and she was thankful for his presence  
and his acceptance of her,  
and she leaped back to the village in joy.

Sometimes, we work backwards, first feeling joy,  
like my friend in Long Island,  
for the presence of hymns in her head,  
and then back to realizing how thankful she was  
for this constant reminder of an ongoing relationship with God, and that took her  
back to a deeper place of trust with God.

Sometimes we pick up the process in the middle,  
by cultivating gratitude,  
and allow God's presence to move us into trust and into joy.

I don't think there's a right path.  
But somehow it all centers on gratitude.  
The Israelites missed the point in our story today.  
They expected and felt entitled  
that God would provide for them  
mountain top experience after mountain top experience without responding with  
gratitude.  
Had they only opened their hearts to God,  
they would have seen they had already been given  
all that they needed.  
May we too understand  
God has already given us everything we need  
including grateful hearts to know that it is enough.  
Our thirst has been quenched by the living Christ. Amen.