

## From Paradise to Wilderness



Our reflection on water this week starts with an account of community unrest and a severe lack of drinkable water. The people of Israel have made their exodus from slavery and entered the Sinai Peninsula (see map below). This long trek to freedom would not be easy and they were to find one of the early challenges was the lack of water.

They are in the Wilderness of Shur and later move to the Wilderness of Sin (Exodus 17). The wilderness of Sin is between Elim and Sinai. The word given as 'Sin' has no connection with transgression, rather it is probably derived from the Moon God Sin or Suen not to be confused with the wilderness of Zin .

The Israelites found the waters at Marah were bitter and complained to Moses. We can have empathy with both Moses and the Israelites, Moses' words catch the tense atmosphere when he says 'What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.' (Exodus 17:4). I imagine they knew it was not going to be easy but no drinkable water so early on their journey to freedom was not the first thing on their mind. I can understand their words 'Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?'. (Exodus 17:3).

We read in the account of the water at Marah that Moses threw a branch of a tree in the water which sweetened it. This may sound strange but there are accounts of trees such as the Moringa oleifera being used to treat water.

### Marah, Massah and Meribah

When they came to **Marah**, (Exod 15:23-25) they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called **Marah**.) So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What are we to drink?" Then Moses cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became fit to drink. There the LORD issued a ruling and instruction for them and put them to the test.

**Massah and Meribah** (Exod 17:1-7). is the name given to a place near Rephidim where the Israelites arrived after moving on from the Wilderness of Sin. Not finding drinking water there, they murmured against Moses and were almost ready to stone him. At the command of the Lord he went on before the people to the rock at Horeb which he struck with his rod so that it brought forth water. Moses named the location "Proof and Contention" because of the Israelites' fault-finding and their putting the Lord to the test

Adapted from Gateway On-line Encyclopaedia of the Bible

#### Wilderness of Sin

Matson Collection - Public domain

#### Well in the desert

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## Readings from Exodus

### Water at Marah

So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; then they went out into the Wilderness of Shur. And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people complained against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" So he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet. (Exodus 15, 22-25, NKJV)

### Map of the Sinai Peninsula from biblemapper.com



### Water at Massah and Meribah

The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. So they quarrelled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink."

Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the Lord to the test?" But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?"

Then Moses cried out to the Lord, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me. "The Lord answered Moses, "Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile and go. I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarrelled and because they tested the Lord saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?" (Exodus 17: 1-7 NKJV)

Our two short accounts of water from Exodus can speak loudly today. The lack of fresh water to drink can easily become a major issue for many people across the world, causing pain and death it can lead to civil unrest. Any freedom people have becomes tainted without water fit to drink. There has never been a time when there has not been a struggle to have access to the basic natural resource, water. Water is a crucial component for life.

For most of us the worse consequence of a water shortage is a hose pipe ban. It is an inconvenience but not life threatening. We are fortunate, we can turn a tap and out flows water, or we buy bottles water to drink. It is just so easy to take it for granted. It is good to pause and reflect on our flowing water and give thanks with grateful hearts for our ample supply of water and support those who seek to provide water to those who do not have a safe supply.

I am mindful of the words of Henri Nouwen, the Dutch theologian who wrote 'One of the most tragic events of our time is that we know more than ever before about the pains and sufferings of the world and yet are less and less able to respond to them'. (Henri Nouwen Compassion, A Reflection on the Christian Life,1982). Those words are still sadly true today.

Let us take the frustration expressed by Henri Nouwen into our time of reflection today.

## Time for a break!

Over the next few weeks, we will be reflecting on water. For many of us in northern Europe with have an abundance of water, for others it is the opposite. There can be a tendency to take things for granted until they are not there. So . . .



**Slowly pour out a glass of water**

**Hear the water as it flows into the glass.**

**Find your favourite space for this time of prayerful reflection**

**Place the glass of water on a table and light a candle.**

**Slow down, breathe calmly, be comfortable and relax.**

**'Is anyone thirsty?**

**Come and drink - even if you have no money!**

(Isaiah 55:1 New Living Translation)

Come all who are weary and let the water refresh you and may the quiet pools of God's love embrace.

Let us remember that the Lord is here, and His Spirit is with us, washing away the dust and grime of our lives. His Spirit is poured out on all who thirst.

Be still and know that I am God. (Click the link to listen)

 **YouTube** <https://youtu.be/dbBImzfVy94?si=HVRf1hNJ9IQNRWwv&t=3>

The words of the hymn appear on the screen via the YouTube link.

Our reading from Exodus

. . . they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they *were* bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people complained against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" So he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree. When he cast *it* into the waters, the waters were made sweet. (Exodus 15, 22-25, NKJV)

## Water Access Prayers

O God, who causes streams to flow in the wilderness and the desert to blossom as a rose, look mercifully, we beg you, on the plight of those who lack access to safe drinking water. You have bestowed upon us mercy that surpasses human comprehension already in the sacrifice of your Son. Yet we beseech you, the Father of all mercies, to supply nonetheless the needs of those deprived of clean water to drink.

This problem, O God, far exceeds the capacities of human ingenuity, and we can hope to combat it effectively only through your gracious assistance. Heavenly Father, grant the prayers of the poorest human beings, including many of your own people, for water that will slake their thirst without wracking their bodies with disease. In caring for the bodies of the poorest, O God, have mercy as well upon their souls, and let our prayers, their nourishment, and every facet of your creation abound greatly to your glory. These things we ask in Christ's name. Amen.

From - The Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation

When asked about how to pray Jesus gave these simple but profound words, so let them be our prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name;  
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil. Amen

We end with a few moments stillness

Let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord, in the name of Christ Amen

Fr Derek Akker

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(Derek is a retired Anglican Parish Priest and a member of the congregations of All Saints & St James. Prior to his ordination he was accredited as a Methodist Preacher in 1968 and served within the Methodist Church until returning to the Anglican Church in the mid 1980's)

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**Image - Impact of a drop of [water](#).** Featured picture, Picture of the year, Picture of the day  
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