

Exodus 17: 1-7  
Psalm 78: 1-4, 12-16  
Philippians 2:1-13  
Matthew 21:23-32

Good morning. I'm AnnaMarie, your seminarian this year. I feel blessed and honored to be here at Resurrection with all of you.

If you read the parish email a few weeks ago, you'll know I'm from San Francisco. Living on the West Coast, I was used to seeing my family in Los Angeles several times a year. So I was really excited when my parents, my two nieces, and my sister came out to the East coast this past summer. I took the train up to Boston to meet them for the 4th of July. We took a boat tour of the Boston harbour that ran over into their usual lunch time. We were all a little cranky with heat and low blood sugar, and my nieces started to complain. My sister asked them, "Have we ever let you starve?" They both rolled their eyes, but then they admitted that, yes, they'd had delicious donuts for breakfast and no, they'd never been deprived of a meal, and -- ok, fine, they could make it another 45 minutes until we had lunch.

Now, in the Old Testament reading, we find the children of Israel still travelling through the Wilderness of Sin. Our Psalm this morning gives us a quick recap of what the Israelites have experienced over the past several weeks:

- God working wonders in Egypt, sending the plagues to convince Pharaoh to let them go.

- The Lord splitting the waters of the Red Sea, so that they could pass through those waters to freedom.
- The Lord leading them by a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night.

And last week, we heard how, when the Israelites cried out in hunger, the Lord fed them with miraculous manna, and with quail.

So here we are, again, with the congregation of the Israelites. Still in the wilderness. Still following Moses, but still quarreling with him. Still fretful, and fearful. What are they worried about this time? God has freed them, after all, and God has fed them.

But this time, they are thirsty. They are camped at Rephidim, and there is no water to drink. No water for them, no water for their animals, no water for their thirsty children.

Have you ever been in a situation without enough water? Or without safe water? Consider the people in Puerto Rico right now -- so many don't have access to clean drinking water -- or the people in Flint, Michigan, being billed by the city for water they cannot drink or even wash with. Water is the most basic, and the most urgent, human need.

I remember going on a hike that went longer than expected on a day that got hotter than expected, and I'd only brought one bottle of water. That water was all I could think about - would it last? Would someone share with me? How

soon after we got back to our cars could we stop and buy something cold to drink? I don't remember much else about that hike, except for my thirst.

The Israelites were thirsty, yes, but really, they were afraid. It was their fear that led them to complain, and led them to doubt. Their fear made them forget who they were, and *whose* they were. They forgot that God was with them, guiding them and providing for them. They forgot their story.

Now, *WE* know the story of the Israelites: even if we didn't learn the stories in Sunday School maybe we've seen Cecille B. De Mille's *The Ten Commandments*, or the animated *Prince of Egypt*. We know they will come to Mt. Sinai and build a golden calf and receive the Ten Commandments and build a tabernacle to the Lord and finally, after forty years of wandering, cross the Jordan river into the Promised Land. We know their story. And, with our 20/20 hindsight, their fear, their fretting, their lack of trust, seems silly, even scandalous.

But what about us? Do we know our own story? Do we remember who we are, and whose we are?

I've been here at Resurrection for a few weeks now, and I'm learning your names, learning your stories, learning what brought you here and what brings you back. Back on campus, and back home in California, people ask me about Resurrection. "Who are they?" they say. "What are they like? What is their story?"

It would be easy to answer those questions with numbers, like the age of the church, the size of the congregation. But what I usually tell people is that, when I first visited Resurrection, it was clear to me that you loved each other. I sensed a real connection among you all that I didn't always feel in other churches. Also, I was impressed by your determination to face the reality of your "numbers", and to write a new chapter in your story that challenges the expectation that churches like this one will simply decline and fade away. In your discernment, and in your outreach, I saw lived out what Paul wrote to the Philippians, "it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

The chief priests and the elders who heard Jesus teaching in the temple were trying to figure out how Jesus fit in to their story. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked him. What they're really meant was, "Do you have authority over us?" "Do we have to live differently because we have met you?"

And of course Jesus offers his listeners a parable in response, a parable of a father and of two sons. One son promises he will go work in his father's vineyard as he is told, but then does not. He forgets his place, and his relatedness. The other son initially defies his father, refusing to be sent to work. (I imagine him telling his father "no" with a great roll of his eyes. But in the end, he remembers that his father has authority over him. He remembers that the fruit of the

vineyard is what sustains them all. He remembers his obligation and his relatedness. He remembers his place in the story.

Just a little while ago, we read together words from Psalm 78:

*“We will recount to generations to come  
The praiseworthy deeds and the power of the Lord,  
And the wonderful works he has done.”*

This is what we do when we gather every Sunday, to hear readings from the Old and New Testaments and to celebrate the Eucharist. We are telling each other -- and ourselves -- of the wonderful works God has done. Works God has done for us, and through us. We are remembering our place in the story.

Where are you in the stories today? Perhaps something in your life has you scared and doubting, like the Israelites. Perhaps you're trying to make sense of God's call on your life, like the chief priests and elders. Or perhaps you're the son in the vineyard -- working where you've been sent, even though it's hard, even though sometimes you'd rather be doing almost anything else.

Beatrice Bruteau, a scholar of prayer and spirituality, once wrote, “Fear keeps us stuck in the present reality, constricted and paralyzed by the very thing God is setting about to redeem. Fear distracts us from watching and waiting eagerly for the inbreaking of God's promises into the world.”<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Beatrice Bruteau, “Prayer: Insight and Manifestation.” *Contemplative Review*, Fall, 1983.

One of the reasons we come here, to this church and to this table, is free ourselves from fear, and to be reminded of God's promises. We come here to relocate ourselves in God's story again. When feelings of fear and doubt, confusion or reluctance arise, we listen to the stories of our forebears, to the stories of the Israelites and of the early church. We listen, too, for the story of God in this place -- in the people of Resurrection -- and in our own lives.

What fear is holding you back? What do you find yourself reluctant to do? And where has God been at work in your story? In the story of those around you? In your presence here at Resurrection, and out in the world?

I look forward to hearing your stories, of how God is at work in your lives. I look forward to writing a chapter of my story here with you. And I look forward to watching the story of the people of God at Resurrection unfold in such a way that "we will recount to generations to come the praiseworthy deeds and the power of the Lord, the wonderful works he has done."

Amen.