

## **River of Compassion**

Exodus 17:1-7, John 4:5-42

### **Slide: The Nile**

It is likely that the most important feature of the ancient Egyptian landscape was the Nile River. That is still likely the case even today.

Surrounded by an otherwise barren landscape, the Nile flows thousands of miles in the heart of Africa, creating an amazing swath of lush, beautiful green and abundant life a mile wide on each side. It is some of the most fertile region on earth, often coined as being the “breadbasket of antiquity.”

### **Slide: Water drop**

My “David Attenborough” narration aside, it is no wonder then, that our Old Testament stories of Moses and the Israelites center prominently on water and it’s abiding, life-giving qualities. Water is where the baby Moses is placed in a basket to save him and where he is drawn out by Egyptians to raise him. Water is where Pharaoh goes to bathe, only to find the first

plague that of water turning to blood bring immediate crisis to the people in the story. And, ultimately, the parting of the Red Sea brings about the freedom from slavery that the people of God desperately want.

It is very clear in the Biblical witness that WATER is the place whereby God does God’s wonders, where God acts, where God shows up to the people. If you want to see where God is and if God is with you, you looked to the water source where God was present.

Should it be surprising then that when there is no water, and while wandering around in the desert looking desperately for a water source, Moses and the people of God begin to wonder where God is and what God is doing? Call it complaining if you want, but if the way God showed God’s presence in the past was in water, and now there was none, wouldn’t you ask:

### **Slide: Is God with us**

**“Is God with is or not?”**

Then, Lo and behold, a rock is struck and water gushes forth as God commands through the servant Moses. God has not left them and it is water that shows them God's actions to save them.

**Slide: Iconic Syrian Boy**

This week marks the sixth year of the civil war that is in Syria. The now very famous picture of this little boy shell shocked after his family was bombed to shreds took the Internet by storm and led to an outcry by the whole Church to do anything to help save refugees and get them to safety. Today, this crisis in Syria is by far the largest forced human migration in modern history and as you know, many of the refugees face dangerous desert, landmines and bombings to get out. Ultimately, every refugee has to cross the Mediterranean Sea to find food, water, and safety. They are not unlike the Israelites, desperate for a way out. At times such as these, when looking at the undeniable suffering of the neighbor, no matter how foreign, wouldn't you ask:

**Slide: Is God with us**

**"Is God with us or not?"**

**Slide: Quilts**

Then on the other side of the sea, refugees are met in Greece with Mission Quilts, School kits, Baby Care Kits, water, food, and sanitation brought to them by Lutheran World Relief, many of these supplies sent to Lutheran World Relief by people such as you. There, the life giving water of the sea and clean water from newly built wells in refugee camps brings the relief they need. It doesn't fix it, but it's a start.

**Slide: Famine in Somalia**

And, in the last several weeks, we have been inundated with the suffering of children, of all human life starving from drought. A lack of water has caused its own desert and lack of crops in the Sudan, Kenya, Yeman and Somalia. Families are literally starving to death. They have limited fresh water. On February 20<sup>th</sup>, the Government of South Sudan declared portions of Unity State

in famine or high likelihood of it due to war and a collapsing economy, mostly due to fighting over resources. The food insecurity and the pictures I'm seeing in that place right now make me feel sick. In fact, I could barely stomach most of the pictures to put on a slide for this sermon. Most of them were far too overwhelming to show. This was the best one I could find. It makes me sick enough to ask:

**Slide: Is God with us**

**"Is God with us or not?"**

**Slide: Lutheran World Relief**

Then I see that Lutheran World Relief has committed 120 million for emergency response to help communities affected by drought to rebuild water infrastructure, enabling those who are experiencing crop loss to purchase food in the short-term and increase their ability to respond to drought in the long term. LWR does this because of churches such as this one who supports them. You support them by giving here and also to them directly. It doesn't fix the

political and economic problem, but it's a start.

It's true in our lives, too isn't it? Indeed, we may not be starving or running for our lives. I pray that will always be true for all of us. But, we have our individual forms of suffering some that is pressed upon us and some that we do to ourselves. We fail at relationships. We lose loved ones. We get sick, get injured or grow infirm. We succumb to depression or lose our sense of direction in life. We grow apathetic about the state of the world and we live with increasing hopelessness in what to do about it. And, there is never a promise that the threat of violence or calamity will not touch us. It is and can be easy to ask:

**Slide: "Is God with us or not?"**

And, we want a sign just as the Israelites got. Just give me a sign God, so I know this is right or what to do. Give me a miracle. Hit the rock and give me water, so that I may know that you are truly with me.

**Slide: Living Water**

Then we hear today in our Gospel story that Jesus comes thirsty and he is also looking for water. He happens upon a well where he has no way of drawing water and there he meets a foreigner. She probably wonders if God is with her as the Israelites did. She has been unhappy in marriage multiple times, lives in a culture that does not value her, and she has to draw water in the middle of the day to avoid those who would likely shun her. One might think that in meeting Jesus who gives true living water, she would want to keep it all to herself, or stay at the well, or maybe even go from that place telling no one.

But, instead she drops her water jars, runs into the village and tells everyone bringing them to the source of the living water himself, Jesus Christ. This makes her the first missionary, the first to bring others to Jesus and to know the joy of God's presence and promise to be with them. Because of her response to God, she brings others to the sign of God's presence truly before them as the Living Water.

**“Is God with us or not,” the Israelites asked.**

Where do *we* go to find the answer to this that we long to have answered? (*Pastor Christine will walk to the font to deliver the rest of the sermon.*)

**Slide: Baptism Living Water**

Here. This is our well, the baptismal font. This is the Living Water poured out and marked upon you – the Living Spirit that is given to you. When I teach the 8<sup>th</sup> graders about Holy Baptism, I sometimes ask them why it is that the Baptismal Font sits here in the chancel area of the church. Why not the back of the church or down where the people are or even in the choir area? The usual answer is so that people can see (although I'm sure many of you can't see everything at a baptism).

Although that's practical, that is not the reason. Here at St. John's, we have a mission statement. That mission statement starts at the font and its general movement begins here and sweeps out into the

world. That's why our logo looks like it does. Here is the mission statement again, although it's painted out in Gathering Area, too:

**Slide: St. John's Logo**

*"St. John's Lutheran Church is a people formed in the waters of Christian baptism to be a fountain of life for all who gather here flowing into a river of compassion for the world."*

Do you want to know where God is and if God is with us or not? God is here in Living water, given to us for the forgiveness of sins, washes us clean to be a River of Compassion in the World.

**Is God with us? Where is God?**

**Slide: God is here**

- God is within you - in Syria with Lutheran World Relief.
- God is within you - in the Sudan through Lutheran World Relief.
- God is within you at Feed My People
- At Community Table
- At the coffee hour
- At FEAST meal

- At Holy Communion
- At the St. John's Apartments and the nursing homes
- At your place of work
- At your home and in your relationships

That River of Compassion starts in the waters of baptism, in the Living Water of Jesus Christ, given to us in parched places so that we may know God is indeed with us here in water, in word, in bread and wine, in this world, in the person next to you.

The sending every time we leave worship reminds us that we are sent from this place into the world to be Christ for others. This is why our worship ends with God in peace. Serve the Lord. Or God in peace, remember the poor. Or, Go in peace, be Living Water for others. So, go. Go out into the world to show the world that God indeed is in it through you for Christ has no feet or hands in this world but ours. And, take heart that God is there for you in the smile of a neighbor, in the sharing of the peace, and in the promises of God for eternal life. Thanks be to God.