

God Has Long Been in the Habit of Going out of His Way to Reach Broken, Sinful, Grumbling People

"If one ever needed evidence or proof of the maxim that 'the essence of sin is ingratitude,' one would not need to look further than our Old Testament reading lesson from Exodus," the Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander said in his sermon Sunday.

"The children of Israel are on the move," he continued. "God has rescued them from slavery in Egypt and is leading them toward the land of promise—but the road from Egypt to the promised land is not exactly a straight line from point A to point B. . . . (T)heir new life requires a daily trust and commitment in God that tests them to their very core. . . . Every day they must trust in God for the bare necessities. Days turn to weeks, and weeks turn to months, and before long you have a group of people who are having a real hard time trying to 'accentuate the positive.'"



"Healing of the Man Born Blind", by El Greco (1570), in the Gemaldegalerie, Dresden. In the Gospel lesson Sunday, this uneducated beggar is chosen by Jesus for healing and then is able to engage with the Pharisees about the powerful work of God through Jesus. Similarly, in the O.T. lesson the Lord directs Samuel to anoint David—the youngest and least likely of Jesse's sons—to be king, at which time the Spirit of the Lord "came mightily upon him". Photo credit: www.abcgallery.com

They complain about a lack of drinking water, and Moses strikes the rock, which then gushes forth water, "a metaphor for the the satisfaction of spiritual needs." So, one might think that Moses "would name the place, 'The Water Rock,' or 'The Place of Living Water' or 'Streams of Mercy.'"

"He does not. He names the place . . . the place of testing and the place of arguing, because the people argued with Moses and tested the Lord. It's a sad thing that Moses' memory of this great event is the memory of people who are petty, ungrateful and downright mean. . . ."

"Now come with me to our Gospel lesson from John 4. . . . In Samaria, Jesus meets a woman at Jacob's well in the village of Sychar. He strikes up a conversation with her, and this becomes the longest recorded conversation between Jesus and an individual in the New Testament.

This woman "was definitely on the margins. Respectable women would come to the well to draw water in the morning, where they would greet one another and talk about the news and whatever else was happening in the village. But this woman was probably one the others talked about, and the fact that she shows up at noon in the heat of the day was a sure sign that she was not welcome in the morning when the others gathered." Her conversation with Jesus was extraordinary and "never should have happened. But when John tells us early in the text that Jesus *had* to go through Samaria, that's what he means. He doesn't mean it as a geographical necessity . . . He means that Jesus *had* to go through Samaria because God was up to something. Do you remember the words (p. 2→)

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Sundays
10:00 a.m.: Word & Table service
11:30 a.m.: Refreshments, conversation
11:45 a.m.: Post-service discussion

**The Harbinger will not
publish next week.**

6:00 p.m.: (First Sundays only) Evensong

Tuesday and Thursday, 6:30 p.m.: Lenten Evening Prayers

Readings, 3/2, 10 a.m.: 1 Sam. 16:1-13; Ps. 23; Eph. 5:1-14; John 9:1-13, 28-38. **3/2, 6 p.m.:** Ps. 19 (sung); Gen. 48:8-22; Rom. 8:11-25. **3/9:** Ezek. 37:1-14; Ps. 130; Rom. 6:13-23; John 11:17-44.

Prayer Emphases: Monaco; Mennonite Church; Christ Memorial Lutheran Church, St. Louis, MO, and the Rev. Gregory Smith; Prison Fellowship International; parishioners on Covina Circle.

(Sermon, cont'd.) of the risen Jesus to his disciples just prior to . . . Pentecost? He tells them, "You will be my witnesses, beginning in Jerusalem, then to Judea, to Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth." Did you catch that? Jerusalem, Judea, SAMARIA. Jesus is telling the disciples that when the wind of the Spirit blows it will leave no place untouched—even places we would consider off limits, and persons we would consider unreachable. I think Jesus . . . *has* to go through Samaria, because he is committed to going out of his way to reach broken, hurting, lost, people. He *had* to be at Jacob's well—for this woman. . . . God has long been in the habit of going out of his way to reach broken, sinful, even grumbling and complaining people"—as Jesus did for us, by going "out of his way to walk with us," and dying for us "while we were still sinners."