

WATER FROM THE ROCK

08/03/2026 – Third Sunday of Lent – Year A

Exodus 17:1-7 | Psalm 95 | Romans 5:1-11 | John 4:5-42

+ *May I speak in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

I. Quarrel & Thirst

Dear friends in Christ,

I am a great admirer of Desmond Tutu and his wonderful sense of humour. I had the privilege of hearing him speak several times, and on one occasion, he opened his talk with the following well-known story:

A man was walking through a dark, thick forest at night - a true wilderness - when he suddenly tripped and fell over the edge of a cliff. As he tumbled down, he managed to grab hold of a sturdy branch. There he hung in the pitch black, his muscles aching, certain that if he let go, he would fall hundreds of feet to his death. In his desperation, he started to pray: **"God, if you're there, help me! Save me, and I'll change my life! I'll stop complaining! Just give me a sign!"** Suddenly, a booming voice came from the heavens: **"Do you trust me?"** The man yelled back, **"Yes, Lord! I trust you completely! Just save me!"** The voice replied: **"Then let go of the branch."** Silence. The man paused for a long moment, looked down into the dark abyss, and then yelled: **"Is there anyone else up there I can talk to?"**¹

In my recent conversations with people around me, I've noticed that many are living in "crisis mode." There is a growing sense that the world is going mad. On one hand, people recognise the weight of our existential problems; on the other hand, there is a feeling that not enough is being done to address these massive challenges. We are unmistakably living in a time of great change. Old securities and long-standing political alliances are

1 See <https://www.stewardshipoflife.org/jokes/>

collapsing. In this moment, it seems very hard to believe in a God who will bring justice and peace at the end of time. To many, it feels as though our world is simply falling apart.

Many have entered a "survival mode," and our conversations are filled with grievances. We blame political parties; we blame the rich or, conversely, the poor; or we blame migrants and foreigners, holding them guilty for the mess in which we find ourselves. You can feel that in many parts of our societies, people have simply lost hope and turned to bitterness and complaint.

But we are not the first generation to find itself in a time of existential crisis. Our first Bible reading today leads us into a story where people are in a very dangerous moment of their lives. In this passage, the Israelites are quite literally fearing for their lives. After their hopeful escape from slavery in Egypt, they are now terrified they will die from a lack of water. They have entered "survival mode." It is understandable that emotions are running high; violence is in the air. They blame Moses for this mess and are nearly ready to kill him.

They even begin to question if it was truly God's plan to lead them out of the relative security of Egypt. As they lose hope, they start to question their entire relationship with God. It feels like a couple on the brink of divorce - a relationship in crisis because of gruelling circumstances.

Moses, too, is at a breaking point in his leadership; he needs help. And help comes. God does not give up on the relationship with His people. Even while the Israelites are questioning Him, He comforts them and brings life-giving water from the rock. It is a profound act of love in a moment of deep distrust.

II. Hardened Hearts

Like the Israelites in the wilderness, many people in today's world do not feel safe. Wars, domestic violence, child abuse, inflation, the political power plays of the mighty, workplace bullying, and loneliness are difficult, existential challenges that people face daily. Just like those wandering in the desert, human beings today are a thirsty people walking through the wilderness of this world. We can give this thirst many names: We are thirsty to be

recognised and loved; we are thirsty for security and safety in a world that often feels like a slippery place; and we are thirsty for emotional stability. There are also fundamental existential needs, such as food and water. For some, this thirst can become so unbearable that they begin to lose hope.

People without hope can be quite uneasy companions. I experienced this often when I was a job counsellor with Caritas. The last project I worked on was for the long-term unemployed; some of my clients had not held a paid job for a decade. The reasons varied from illness and insufficient education to their family backgrounds. When these clients came to me, the first session always began with complaints. They asked why they had to be there and questioned my ability to help them. They blamed the system for their situation, arriving with hardened hearts and minds. They were so filled with grief, anger, and despair that they were unable to accept help. It was always hard work to provide space for their anger, to truly listen, and to build a relationship of trust. And that trust was always the key to a fresh start.

This is not only true for the counselling experience. As human beings, we live in an imperfect world. There are many areas in this life where people like you and me simply lose hope - moments where we are stuck in bad experiences and feel unable to accept help. Like the Israelites, we are all in the wilderness of this world, trying to survive. This experience of the world's "imperfectness" affects our relationship with God. We begin to quarrel and turn away from Him in despair. A lack of trust, violence, and loud emotions are often signs of a broken relationship - and this is just as true for our relationship with God as it is for our relationships with one another.

III. Medicine

In this imperfect world, healing for our broken and fragile relationships with God and one another is needed. So what is the medicine that human beings need?

Psalms 95, which we sang together earlier, gives us some ideas. In the *Book of Common Prayer*, this Psalm is usually used as an opening canticle for Morning Prayer. It is, in a way, a daily remembrance to take the medicine that is needed to heal our relationship with God. So let us have a closer look at the suggestions from Psalm 95.

In the *Book of Common Prayer*, the Psalm starts this way: **“O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving: and show ourselves glad in him with psalms.”**²

Thanksgiving is the key word. The beginning of the Psalm is an invitation to remember what God has already done for us in the past.

A few verses later comes another important suggestion: **“To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts: as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness;”**³ The Psalm invites us to listen and to open our hearts.

Thanksgiving and listening are the two important points. Gratefulness and open hearts help us to rebuild trust. Remember what the Lord has done for us already in our life.

In the job counselling at Caritas, I very often started very early in the counselling process to rework and polish the CV together with the clients. And the effect was very often that they looked at their nicely laid out CV and recognised what had already happened in their lives and that they had a lot of competencies. It was a way of focusing more on their talents than on their lacks. Remembrance, gratefulness, and open hearts are powerful tools to rebuild trust.

IV. Relationship

And this is not only true for my clients. We can be grateful for everything God has already done for us. This is what all our readings connect to today. God takes care of us. He loves us and believes in the relationship between Him and us. Even when we are complaining and quarreling, He comforts us and maintains that relationship. Even when we have doubts and distrust Him, He tries to heal our relationship. He gives life-giving water in the wilderness. In the letter to the Romans, it is written that Christ died for the ungodly (Romans 5:6). He died for sinners (Romans 5:8) to reconcile the world to Himself (Romans 5:11). He suffered for the unjust. In Christ, the relationship between us and God was restored; this is an act of grace born out of love. In today's Gospel, we learn that Jesus is

2 The Church of England (2019): *The Book of Common Prayer*. Cambridge University Press. P. 5.

3 Id.

the one who gives life-giving water (John 4:11). He is the true rock from which the life-giving water flows. Through Him, we have peace.

V. Lent

There is a reason we read these texts in particular during Lent. Lent is the time when we reflect on our relationship with God. It is a time when we remember God's grace and prepare for Holy Week. We look forward to Maundy Thursday, where we remember how wonderfully God saved His people from slavery in Egypt. We will reach Good Friday and the crucifixion - Christ's suffering for us. And finally, we prepare for the Resurrection, our salvation, and the new life in Christ. Lent is a time to reflect on our relationship with God. Do we truly love Him? Do we trust Him? It is a season where we are asked to listen and to be thankful.

At the beginning of this Lent, I started a 'Thanksgiving Diary.' This is my spiritual exercise until Easter. It is very simple: every morning, I spend five minutes writing down all the things in my life for which I am thankful. When I started, I thought there wouldn't be much to write. But after a few days, I recognised how many gifts God has already given me. I have already had a rich life. I realised that Lent is not about my merits, but about God's grace.

Coming back to our story from the beginning: imagine yourself as the man hanging at the edge of the cliff. Would you let go of the branch? Would you trust the voice that is calling you?

Amen.