

**From Marah to Elim
Thanksgiving 2018
November 18, 2018**

Psalm 63:1-8

O God, you are my God; I earnestly search for you.

My soul thirsts for you;

my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land
where there is no water.

I have seen you in your sanctuary

and gazed upon your power and glory.

Your unfailing love is better than life itself;

how I praise you!

I love this Psalm because it unmasks a fallacy in our thinking about God,
a fallacy I know that Pastor Verity put to rest last Sunday.

We wrongly assume that praising God necessitates being happy;

but the writer of the Psalm, David, is not happy.

He feels lost, thirsty, weary, desperate to connect with God.

In fact, as Pastor Verity shared with us last week

one third of the Psalms are Songs of Lament where the writer's words
pour out of a heart overwhelmed with agony, longing or despair.

What does this mean for us today?

You might say, I can't participate in today's sharing because I'm not full of joyful praise.

I'm the one in the **parched and weary land where there is no water.**

I'm the one dying of **thirst.**

When David wrote this Psalm, he might have been thinking of the Children of Israel,
on their trek from Egypt to the Promised Land.

We read in Exodus 15:22-27

So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea (*Reed Sea*);

The Israelites have been miraculously delivered from the Egyptians
when God parted the Red Sea (Reed Sea) and they cross on dry land,
and then the waters close over the Egyptians when follow in pursuit.
They are liberated! They are FREE!
But it quickly becomes apparent they are *not spiritually* free.

Then they went out into the Wilderness of Shur.
And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water.

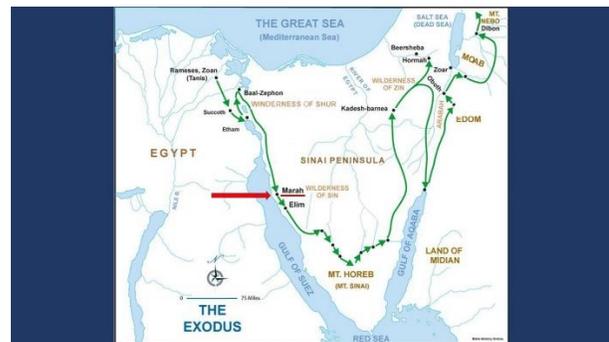
They are thirsty to the point of panic.
Consider . . .

Over a million people and their livestock needed water
and were without a fresh source after 3 days of travel in the desert.
Would you panic?

Now when they came to **Marah**.

This has added significance to me
because John and I visited Marah in Egypt.

This is what it looks like today.
A collection of wells.



Very deep wells.

But back in the day,
it probably looked more like this.
A body of water bubbling up in the desert.



The Israelites' hopes are revived as they come to Marah because they see . . . WATER!

*Only . . . They could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter.
Therefore, the name of it was called Marah. (which means bitter)*

Here is the rub.

And the people complained against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?"

Apparently, the water was not the only thing that was bitter.
They are in a barren place, but this barrenness serves to reflect what is in their heart.
Not only is the water bitter, but their heart is bitter as well.
Marah forever becomes the symbol of discouragement, disappointment, depression,
disillusionment, hopelessness . . . *bitterness*.

Their hearts are still enslaved to the past.
They are only three days out of Egypt with generations of slavery behind them.
Very likely the Israelites still believed they were no more than property;
their opinions were worthless;
they couldn't take care of themselves.
They still see themselves as at the mercy of other people and circumstances.
Have you been there?
I have.
They are yet to grasp the limitless power of God available to give living water.

And so, when pressed beyond measure they don't bleed grace
They bleed out complaint, self-pity . . . marah . . . bitterness.

Bitterness is tormenting.
Bitterness makes us feel sorry for ourselves and *always* leads us into sin.
Oh God, deliver us all from this drought of the soul!

He's got lots of work to do to heal them from their negativity.
They've got a ways to go to become the cohesive, courageous, faith-inspired people
who would capture and occupy the Promised Land.

But the Lord is merciful . . .

So [Moses] cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree.
When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet (drinkable).

How interesting that the Lord doesn't take away the bitter water.
and replace it with something fresh.
He *transforms* the bitter water into sweet water
by adding a strong agent which will "overpower" the bitterness
and bring the transformation.

And what's that agent? A tree.
A TREE!

Are you starting to see Jesus in this picture?

Now some people conjecture that the tree was a mangrove tree.

Why would that be important?

Because there is a good chance that the water was bitter because of the saline content.

John and I get that.

We swam in the **dead sea**.

It was an amazing experience.

But the rules are, don't splash!

You don't want to get the water in your eyes;
it would burn like crazy!

And you don't want to get it in your mouth;
it tastes terrible (much worse than ocean water)
and drinking it would eventually kill you.



Maybe that was the case with the water of Marah.

But there is this amazing tree . . . the mangrove tree, which grows in that area.

It has an incredible ability to absorb salt out of water,

So *maybe* that's what God did.

Maybe he used something that was already present to solve the problem.

We don't know for sure.

What we know for sure was that God knew how to solve their problem.

There the Lord issued a ruling and instruction for them and put them to the test.

This was their first test that God after leaving Egypt,
and they fail the test.

They were too short sighted . . .

cause you know where they were headed the next day?

**Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees,
and they camped there near the water.**

Elim was their destination!

Elim was right around the corner!



Elim is the oasis of great delight.



So today, if you feel like you are in Marah,
don't pretend you're in Elim.

Lament! It's OK!

If you look at the Psalms, lament is 1/3 of our life experience.

It's OK to say, "I'm in Marah."

I'm thirsty.

My soul is parched.

I'm in a land where there is no water.

I don't know where my next drink will come from.

BUT . . .

I know that God can provide even in Marah,

AND . . . (even better)

Marah is not my destination.

I'm on my way to Elim.

