

“Enough” based on Exodus 17:1-7 and Philippians 2:1-5

Not to give the answer away or anything, but I think both of these passages try to prod us toward trust; trust in God and trust in each other. Exodus tells of God giving the people what they need, Philippians instructs people to take care of each other (which is a way of ensuring everyone's needs are met, if it is done well). When people are paying attention to each other, and to the ones who are most vulnerable, God's abundant creation is able to care for all. I suspect that trusting in God requires two things of us: trusting in each other, and being trustworthy for each other. Let's take a deeper look.

The Exodus story is about the people of God being quarrelsome, whiny, and unfaithful. Or, at least, it seems to be. I've never quite understood this passage though, because they're said by the text itself to be quarrelsome, whiny, and unfaithful BECAUSE they want access to water, and are afraid that they are about to die of thirst. Just as a reminder, they are wandering around a desert. In fact, in the Bible, the words desert and wilderness are functionally interchangeable, and they both indicate that the land is not capable of sustaining human life without God's help.

The people are in the desert without water, and they ask for water, and that's unfaithful? I don't follow. It doesn't seem unfaithful that the people in Puerto Rico are asking for water, water is necessary for life, and they don't have water. They need more than water, but they desperately need water. Just like the people in the desert. In both cases, asking for water doesn't make them whiny, or quarrelsome. It makes them alive, and wanting to stay alive! Being without water is dangerous to life! Articulating that it is a problem and asking for help finding a solution is reasonable, rational, and wise.

Regarding Exodus, I don't think the people misbehave nearly as much as Moses does. The people notice there isn't water and ask for water. Now, if we want to defend Moses we can say that they don't ask terribly politely (“Give us water to drink.”) but within the story itself Moses has performed a heck of a lot of miracles already and has claimed to be leading the people. They don't know why he hasn't dealt with this already. If the leader isn't taking care of the people's needs, the people need not be POLITE in demanding what they need to live.

Moses responds poorly. He takes their request personally. He asks why they are quarreling with him and why they are testing God. Clearly we can now see whose

perspective is dominating the interpretation of the story! (Maybe this is why the tradition has said Moses wrote this book... 😊) His angry response and accusation quiet the people momentarily, but they are still thirsty. They still need water, for life. So they can't be silenced. The second time they ask for water with significantly more drama, perhaps hoping that it will elicit a different response. They are desperate, indicating that dying of dehydration in the desert is worse than slavery in Egypt.

Moses, again, mishears them. He turns to God, but not to advocate for the people, to advocate for himself! He prays, crying out that he doesn't know how to handle the people and they're so angry with him he is afraid for his life.

[#MissingThePoint](#) The story says that God does NOT miss the point though, and responds with a way to provide water. Moses does as he's told, and the people get water. However, the narrative ends with Moses naming the place “Quarreling” and “Testing” as his interpretation of how the people behaved.

According to Deuteronomy, the entire story of the people wandering in the desert is said to be so that they can learn to depend on God, and not on their own capacities. Deuteronomy, in fact, spends a lot of time worrying that once the people enter the land and have milk and honey in abundance they will think this is because of their hard work, rather than God's good grace. Thus, the Exodus narratives are meant to teach that God can be depended on.

This is both an imperative lesson for all people of faith, and a dangerous one. God can be depended on, this I believe. Creation is abundant, and there is enough food, water, shelter, and love for everyone. However, I haven't found human societies to be as dependable as God, and while there is enough in the world, there is not enough if it is hoarded, or wasted. Abundant clean water is being destroyed by fracking, sources of it are drying up with global climate change, and various companies are seeking to glean profit from limiting people's water access except through their sales. Analysis I've read about the humanitarian crisis in Syria that has created a refugee crisis around the world suggests that it started with years of drought that kept people from being able to grow crops and sustain themselves. Furthermore, our sisters, brothers, and siblings in Puerto Rico and other Caribbean islands don't have clean water, and that reality is life threatening.

God created enough, but that doesn't mean people have access to enough. Simply claiming that God will take care of the vulnerable and thirsty doesn't do them any good if the mechanisms of human society prevent them from having access to life giving water.

And yet God created enough, and works with us and through us to connect resources to people in need. In this church we seek to connect food, water, coffee, soap, toilet paper, diapers, hygiene products, home furnishings, flood buckets, hygiene kits, beauty, music, and knowledge to those who need them! (To name a few.) We are part of the work of redistributing so that God's abundance can be known. We are seeking to live out the instructions in Philippians 2.

Did any of the computer geeks notice that the Philippians text is basically written in if/then code? Just me? That's OK. IF there is any encouragement in Christ (implication here seems to be that anyone hearing this would say "YES! Of course there is), IF there is any consolation in love (almost everyone would agree with this), IF there is any sharing in the Spirit, IF you have experienced any compassion and sympathy (so most people by this time are yearning to say yes), THEN "make my joy complete." OK, how?

With connection. Use your lives to take care of each other. Let go of ambition that is only about you and work towards helping others. Be together in love. Actually, it says a lot more, but I think the church and the world both abuse the idea of "unity" as a means of controlling the vulnerable: that is they claim that those who call for justice for all are disturbing the peace and should be silenced in the name of unity. This makes me squirm and I want to skip over the "same mind, same love" part. However, I think more nuance is called for!
([#whenindoubtmorenuance](#))

In an article I read this week on NPR, they talked about the form of Russian influence on US public opinion saying, "Moscow's intelligence agencies not only used secret cyberattacks to steal and leak information, as the U.S. intelligence community concluded. The Russians also openly bought ads on Facebook aimed at amplifying the most controversial issues in American political life — including abortion, guns and LGBT issues — and used fake accounts to spread disinformation and even organize real-life rallies."¹

While I have many strong opinions, most certainly including on the issues that Russia is trying to use our society, I'm really struck by this story. Another country thinks that the best way to destabilize our society and gain influence is by keeping us fighting with each other. It is likely a great strategy, it leads to deep divisions, and could even lead to the destruction of our country. When issues divide us, we can end up not seeing or hearing each other as people at all! So, while I don't much like the instruction to be of the "same mind" (ok, fine, I still hate it), I think perhaps it needs to be taken very seriously. We must work to humanize each other, even across differences.

To return to the stories, God created and created with abundance. When we trust in each other and are trustworthy for each other, there is enough. On this World Communion Sunday, where we are reminded that God's table extends around our globe, may we savor the abundance of creation and seek to be people of trust in that "enough-ness." Amen

1 Philip Ewing "As Scrutiny Of Social Networks Grows, Influence Attacks Continue In Real Time" published September 28, 2017 at 5:01AM ET
<http://www.npr.org/2017/09/28/55402...>

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