



Sermon delivered by
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"Not My Job" (Exodus 17: 1-7)

When you read your October newsletter, you will discover something about our new Youth Director. Joel Brown has a “life verse.” What, you may ask, is a “life verse”? A “life verse” is a piece of scripture that speaks to you and to your life in a deep and poignant way. Think of a “life verse” as a spiritual motto, the words you might find on a family coat of arms, but instead are written on your heart of hearts, even on your very soul. Years ago, I chose a “life verse.” It came from St. Paul’s letter to the church in Rome in which he pointed out to them that, *God works all things together for good*. My “life verse” is from Romans, chapter 8, verse 28, and that verse has inspired me for years. I believe that! I believe God is so charge that God can work all things, *all things*, unlikely things, unfortunate things, great things, good things, little things, God can work *everything* together for good. I need to believe that about God and about God’s authority over my life, and if I did not believe that about God I would be living a highly troubled life. But that verse has never failed to give me peace and confidence. That verse reminds me why I live daily by faith, the faith that *Christ is risen*, and because *Christ is risen* God is working all things together for good, and without exception. That verse helps me to sleep at night and to rise in the morning, or as the hymn we sang earlier, *When morning gilds the skies, my heart awaking cries: May Jesus Christ be praised!*

I know people, and so do you, who begin their day far differently. I know people, and so do you, who begin their day unsure and uncertain about how their day will unfold. I watched the evening news last week, and I am in prayer for those people whose life has been so changed by the hurricanes and especially at what is happening in Puerto Rico. One lady in Puerto Rico was interviewed. She was asked how she would ever begin, again. That lady and her family have lost so much, and yet she looked into the camera and she said, *God has a plan for this island, and I’m sticking with God’s plan*. Could I have said those words? Could you have said those words? Those are the words of a woman of great faith. She knows that God is at work in Puerto Rico.

Long years ago, God had a plan for the Israelites. God got them out of Egypt, out of Pharaoh's bondage, and God was leading them to a new land, to a new beginning, to a promised land. Along the way, reality set in. The people became thirsty. They could find no water, and like what is happening in Puerto Rico today, there was concern and panic due to the lack of water. The joy of deliverance had become replaced by revolt and resentment, and by the fear that God had brought them out of Egypt only to see them die in the wilderness. They give Moses an earful, and like any shepherd, like any pastor worth his or her salt, Moses passes the buck. Moses replies, *Hey, that's not my job. Your beef is not with me. It's with the LORD!* So Moses bangs on God's door, and fearing for his life, as pastor's do every now and then, Moses gives God the scoop, and the LORD tells Moses what to do. Problem solved. Moses does what God tells him to do. Moses strikes the rock, water begins to flow, and the people begin to drink. Problem solved.

Those 7 verses of Exodus 17 are important verses not only to pastors but especially to the life of the church, and I hope their importance is obvious to you. In those 7 verses, we learn **two important lessons** about being the church, and remember this: in being the church you and I are the new Israel. That's us in Exodus traveling out of Egypt and into the wilderness. That's us heading to the Promised Land, and that is also us whining and complaining and fearing for our lives when we run out of food and water. That table is living proof God will never let us go without. Never!

But, it is a matter of time. Sooner or later, we forget that about God. Sooner or later, we run up against some obstacle that appears insurmountable, some conflict that appears unsolvable, someone who is unhappy and who will never be satisfied. It is a matter of time before we panic and fear the worse, and when that happens, what happens? We make known our displeasure. We point the finger at the pastor, at the Presbytery, at the denomination, but always away from ourselves, and we say, *Fix it! Make it better. Solve it. Make him, make her go away.* Your Elders and I have been there and done that. We may not have the t-shirt, but some of us do bear the scars for when life together becomes dicey, and when it seems likely the rocks are about to fly. The **first lesson** is this: there will always be the challenge that appears overwhelming – no water to drink, no money to spend, no members in the pews, no joy in the heart. Challenges are not the exception to life. Challenges are the rule of life. They remind us of what life, what *real* life is all about, what life can be like, what life *is* like. You know the old saying that “life happens when you've made other plans.” That is what happened to the Israelites. They were tasting the Promised Land when life happened to them,

and all at once they had no water to drink. One moment they are seeing visions of the Land of Milk and Honey and the next moment they are writing their obituary.

Word to the wise and word to the faithful: expect, anticipate the challenge, the unforeseen challenge, the unexpected challenge, the unwanted challenge. Challenges are not the exception to life, they are the rule of life, and oftentimes the challenge seem unsolvable, overwhelming, life-threatening. But fear not. Jesus has overcome the world and all of its challenges, not some of them, not the easy ones, but all of them.

The **second lesson** reminds me of my “life verse”: *God works all things together for good*. I’m not sure Moses would have put it exactly that way, but Moses did know where to turn before the rocks began to fly. So Moses cried out to the Lord, *What shall I do with this people?* Pastor’s have been praying that prayer for a long time, and it may well have begun with our friend, Moses. What shall I do with this people? What Moses does is to pray for them, to lift them before the LORD. What Moses does is to turn to God. Moses turns to the LORD in prayer, and Moses gets his prayer answered, he gets the precise answer that he needed.

But, *but* realize this: Moses could have done what? Moses could have taken matters into his own hands. Like a good Presbyterian, Moses could have formed a Water Committee and charged them to find water for the people, and you know all about committees. They would have looked long and hard for water, and they would have found no water at all – because where was the water? The water was in the most unlikely place. You expect to find water in the ground, but the water God supplied came from a rock. God tells Moses, *Strike the rock, and water will come out of it*. Let’s admit it. No self-respecting Water Committee would ever have thought about looking at a rock and expecting to find water, at least not a Presbyterian Water Committee. We would have looked in all the usual and typical and logical places for water, but not from a rock. In other words, we would have looked in all the wrong places, which is why Moses turned immediately to God, why Moses turned to God first, not second, not third, but first.

The second lesson is that God is and must be and must always remain our first source of help, not our Plan B, but our Plan A. The take-away is that what was once true for water out in the wilderness is true about everything else that we need: *God works everything together for good!* Our first response cannot be, must not be to form some committee, to believe we can solve the problem, that we can take charge. Our response must be, has to be to turn to

God and to place our trust into God's hands. *Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged: take it to the Lord in prayer!*

The lesson for this earthly life is that we aren't in charge. Moses never would have found that water, and neither would we have found it. Water from a rock! Who would have thought a rock could yield water? Moses didn't. You and I wouldn't have. No one would look at that rock expecting to find water, which ought to give us pause. What kind of Rock are we talking about? What kind of Rock yields water? I trust you know where I am going with that Rock motif. It is the image of Christ, of standing on Christ, the solid Rock, believing that everything is sinking sand. By faith, we build our life, our mission and witness not on the sinking sand of human effort or cultural preferences. By faith, we pay attention to what the Lord is doing and wants to do for us, things you and I cannot do, things you and I cannot find, things you and I cannot begin to imagine.

God does work all things together for good because we can't do that, and God knows that about us, and the sooner we believe that about ourselves the sooner we will discover why water does flow even from a rock.

Let us pray: Faithful God, challenges surround us all the time, but Your promise is to be with us and to deliver us from those challenges. Grant us the insight to see, to believe You are with us always, and our faith in You is all we need to witness all things being worked together for good and to Your everlasting glory. Amen.