

“Frustration, Instant Gratification, or Patience?”

Exodus 17:1-7

“Anticipation is making me late, keeping me waiting.”

People my age and older who hear the line, “Anticipation is making me late, is keeping me waiting,” will think of either the 1971 Carly Simon hit or Heinz Ketchup or both.

In the late 70’s, before the advent of plastic squeeze bottles and instant condiment gratification, Heinz touted its ketchup as being so thick and rich that it was virtually impossible to get out of the glass bottle. Many of us baby boomers remember having to smack the bottle repeatedly to get the ketchup to come out . . . and that was suppose to be a good thing.

But there was a complication. In the late 80’s, I took our high school youth from Fargo on a wagon Train out of one of our Lutheran Bible Camps in the Black Hills of South Dakota. After a greet week of riding horses on the trail, we were in our old church bus tooling down the highway with pedal to the metal at 60 m.p.h. when we blew out a back tire. Because we had dual’s on the back, I was able to get off at the next exit which happened to be Sturgis and unknown to me, we entered town right in the middle of their annual motorcycle rally.

Scantly clad women on motorcycles, our teenage boy’s noses pressed to glass of the bus windows, when we limped into the Cenex station and they told me they could have the bus ready to go in 4 hours. We went across the street for lunch at the “Roadkill Café.” A large group of North Dakota teenagers, our three women chaperones, and me filled the remaining

tables. It was a noisy café as the black leather clad and tattooed Harley devotees laughed and visited.

One of our young ladies upon receiving her burger and fries was struggling to get ketchup to come out of its glass bottle. She was holding it sideways and pounding on the bottom of it when it suddenly let loose, splattering the leather pants of a rather large, bearded man sitting at the next table. The talking stopped. There was total silence. He glared at her and she sheepishly and weakly squeaked, “I’m sorry.”

From deep within his being, he let out a roar of laughter with everyone else in the Roadkill Cafe quickly joining in. After taking a deep breath, I joined in. Of course when we got back to the church, our youth quickly told their parents about Pastor Doug taking them to Sturgis with no mention of the wagon train or the Bible camp. They wore their Sturgis T-shirts and had many stories to tell from the very long 4 hours we spent there.

So as we revisit the Exodus story this weekend and God’s people’s lack of patience, I want us to think about this question: Do we have a squeeze bottle mentality (trying to get what we want instantly), a glass bottle mentality (in which we experience frustration and turn the bottle upside down, pounding it) or do we have patience (tipping the bottle on its side and tapping until it’s contents flow)?

As Exodus 17 opens in verse 1, God has once again commanded the Israelites to move “by stages” through the desert on their sojourn of escape from slavery and oppression in Egypt.

Just 3 chapters earlier, we read that God had miraculously brought them through the Red Sea by increasing the viscosity of water and making it stand in order to clear a path for the people.

By chapter 15, these same people are sounding more like impatient restaurant patrons than liberated slaves. God, whom the people see as being represented by Moses, isn't delivering water and food fast enough for their liking.

Exodus 15:22, 24 . . . Then Moses ordered Israel to set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went 3 days in the wilderness and found no water. And the people complained against Moses saying, "What shall we drink?"

They have a squeeze bottle mentality, wanting instant gratification.

In Chapter 16, they whine for the good old days in Egypt when, sure, they were slaves but at least their bellies were full.

Exodus 16:2-3 . . . The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

God responds by providing manna and quail as a daily provision of food in the middle of nowhere. When pheasant hunting in Nebraska, we would flush a covey of quail now and then. We'd breast them out and fry them with some tasty venison sausage; a real treat. But not even quail was good enough for the Israelites. The menu was boring and their impatient complaints grow louder.

In our text from Exodus 17, the issue again is the lack of water. Exodus 17:2 . . . The people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?”

In the midst of a crisis, its hard for us to take the long view, to see the big picture and understand God’s long, steady purpose. But when we look at the entire biblical picture and all of human history, we quickly learn that God’s time is very different from our time. While we focus on the shortness of life and getting what we think we need now; God is in for the long haul.

So it’s not surprising that the people are angry that Moses brought them out there to kill them and their livestock with thirst. It’s not surprising that Moses is concerned about his own hide because the people “are almost ready to stone him.”

Exodus 17:3-4 . . . But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our livestock and children with thirst?” So Moses cried out to the Lord, “What shall I do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.”

When we’re in trouble, we can hear the “chronos” clock ticking down our lives with increasing urgency.

God, however, isn’t bound by such a compressed view of time. Throughout the Scriptures, God’s timing, rather than clock time is what really matters. If “chronos” is time

governed by the clock, “Kairos” is time governed by God. Kairos is the right time, the appropriate time, the divinely appointed time.

If God created the universe billions of years ago, as science tells us, and if Earth has been shaped over millions of years by the steady drip of water and the slow shifting of tectonic plates, although the Japanese may be questioning that right now, the one thing we come to realize theologically is that God isn't in a hurry, God has a longer worldview than our temporary bodies and limited knowledge can understand.

God doesn't respond to the people's complaints or Moses' fear with punishment or comfort.

In verse 5-6, The Lord said to Moses, “Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.”

In verse 7 we learn that until their thirst was quenched, the people had been quarreling and saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?”

They had not yet learned that as God's people it doesn't matter where we're going or what we're waiting for at the end of the line – because God is already there. Our patient God does something for his impatient people. God instructs Moses to strike the rock like he's thumping a bottle of ketchup. When the water came out, it was so good that it was worth the wait.

The Israelites would spend a whole generation wandering in the wilderness before entering the Promised Land. God would have to repeat this lesson of patience many times just as Jesus had to constantly remind his disciples to stop worrying about today and instead, seek first God and his kingdom. Do that and everything else will begin to make sense. We might call that living with an “eternal perspective.” We recognize that wherever we’re headed with our lives, God is with us and already there ahead of us. As when Courtney was born, Brian and Melissa knew God was with them and is already there ahead of you as he adopts Courtney into his family this morning through the flowing water and His Word.

Living in a culture in which so many of us have a squeeze bottle mentality, so many of us are driven by instant gratification, a culture in which so many of us succumb to advertising that screams that we not only need something now, but deserve it now; what we really need more than ever is to understand and embrace God’s patience. To understand and embrace God’s time -- kairos time. What we really need is to not get frustrated when our perceived needs are not instantly met and to model our patience for our children and grandchildren.

We need patience so that when we tip the bottle on its side, the ketchup will come out in kairos time, in God’s time so that even the most diverse group of God’s people gathered in the Roadkill Cafe can join together in holy and gut-wrenching laughter.

“Anticipation is making me late, is keeping me waiting.” Anticipation. It’s worth the wait!

May the peace of God . . .

#331 – As the Deer Runs to the River