

Lenten Worship Series: Christ Acts For Us; Sermon Title: When the Going Gets Tough

Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; John 4:5-42

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During this season of Lent, we are striving to understand how Christ Acts For Us. The intent of Lent is that through the reading of scripture and other spiritual practices we can come to a new understanding of the need we have for Christ in our lives. This year because of the Covid-19 pandemic, this Lenten journey is taking on a different meaning. We realize that we are in need of the healing power of Christ in ways we never imagined.

The scriptures for this third Sunday in Lent are intended for us to see our spiritual need for Christ. Our spiritual thirst can be quenched with Living Water of Jesus Christ. We are all thirsty for something: attention, friendship, human contact, love, etc. When we either don't know, or don't allow the Universal, Loving Christ to quench that thirst in us, we will choose many other vices in an attempt to quench a thirst that can only be quenched through Jesus the Christ. This message still applies to all of us today, however, the thing that is consuming our energies is the unknown impact of the coronavirus on our lives. The spread of this virus has become a national emergency. Every media is filled with the latest information about outbreaks, closings, cancellations, the economic impact, ways to prevent the spreading of the virus, and what to do if we have these symptoms. We have been ordered to stay in place for two weeks, especially if we are over 60 and/or are immuno-compromised. The stores have run out of hand sanitizers and paper products. Fear is rampant. Last month as I was planning worship and sermon titles, I choose for today's sermon title, "When the Going Gets Tough." Little did I know just how tough the going was going to be for us. So here we are: you at home and we are here. None of us have ever been through anything like this. We are navigating uncharted territory or perhaps, "terror-tory."

During Epiphany we did a sermon series on "Do Not Fear." One person told me that we need to hear this message again. So, I am going to review some points that might help us get through this next week or so. Adam Hamilton in his book, *Unafraid*, used an acronym for the word **FEAR**- **F**: Face Your Fears with Faith; **E**: Examine your assumptions in light of the facts; **A**: Attack your anxieties with action; **R**: Release your cares to God. These four points are helpful as we step into these next few weeks in the midst of this national health crisis. Before we look at how we can apply these steps to our situation today, I would like us to look at how the Israelites handled their fear of dying of thirst. Thirst and the result of not having adequate fluids can lead to dehydration which can lead to death. This is a concern when someone runs a high fever for a period of time. It is important to make sure this person receives adequate fluids and seeks medical care. The Israelites, after wandering around in the desert with little to nothing to drink, were thirsty. One can dehydrate quickly in the hot desert sun. Most of us have never known this kind of thirst. We have drinkable water and a variety of beverages at our finger tips all the time. The Israelites knew enough that if they didn't get water they would die. They were afraid. How did they face their fears with faith when the going got tough? They didn't. What did they do? They attacked their leader, Moses. This was his fault. He shouldn't have led them out to the desert to die. What short term memories they had! They had forgotten that they cried to be rescued from slavery. God heard their cries and rescued them. They had forgotten how Moses went day after day to beg Pharaoh to free them and how God opened the Red Sea for them for them to escape. Yes, they had forgotten what God has done and now they blame Moses for their situation. They even threaten to kill him. How did they examine their assumptions in the light of the facts? They didn't. They assumed Moses would provide for them. How did they attack their anxieties with action? Well, they did attack and use action, but not in a helpful way. They took action and attacked Moses. Were they able to release their cares to God? No, they didn't even mention God. It is as though they have forgotten everything God did for them. However, Moses faces his fear of being killed with faith. The first thing he does is turn to God for help. "What should I do with this people?" Then when God tells him to do a bazaar thing, like hitting a rock with a stick for water, Moses did what he is told. He had witnessed God doing

even stranger things. Moses doesn't argue or hesitate. He takes action, strikes the rock, and water flows out of the rock. The people have water and their thirst is quenched.

What do we do when the going gets tough? Do we forget what God has already done for us? Do we blame others? We can be afraid-afraid of dying from thirst, or the corona virus, or the flu, or cancer, or a car accident, or a fall down the stairs. We can be afraid of just about anything. One thing is certain, we will all die someday. We just hope it isn't today! How do we face this fear of death? By gathering facts and by taking precautions. These actions ease our anxieties and hopefully ward off death. We go to the doctors. We get immunized. We have surgeries and treatments. We exercise and eat properly. We drive defensively. We stay away from crowded areas, wash our hands, and not touch our faces. We do a number of things to examine our assumptions in light of the facts and take action to ease our anxieties. But where is our faith in the midst of this corona virus pandemic? What do we do when the going gets tough? Do we face our fears with faith? Do we release our cares to God? How are you facing the fear of this pandemic? I hope you are retrieving the information you need to take action. We need to know that this virus is spread by being around someone who has the virus and is sneezing or coughing. We then take action by washing our hands, by not touching our faces and by staying home. Some can't stay home. They must work long hours during this crisis to provide the services our communities need. Besides medical personnel, there are those who provide us with food and with the utilities for our homes, those who pick up our garbage, those who deliver our mail, those who protect us, and I'm sure you can list others who have to be at work so our communities continue to function. Pray for these public servants that they are kept safe from this virus.

If you can remain home, face your fear by taking action. Use this time as a Sabbath time. Catch up on all those things you always wish you could get done, but never have the time. Begin or restart a hobby. Find ways to be creative through writing, drawing, painting, sewing, woodworking. Take walks. Fresh air is good for our health. Take naps. Resting is a way to recharge our bodies. Spend quality time with family members. Play games. Cook and eat together. Many families no longer have time to eat together. Make this time a one filled with pleasant memories. And attend to your faith. Create space in the morning, during the day, or in the evening to read devotional material and scripture. Pray, spend time in silence, and journal your thoughts and feelings. We often say we don't have time in our busy schedule for these. Now's the perfect time to begin this habit. During the season of Lent, we encourage each other to practice spiritual disciplines. Being self-quarantined gives us time to attend to our spiritual lives, to drink from the well of Living Water. Fill up on spiritual things. We may need to draw upon this reservoir in days to come.

Our lives can be filled with so many good things that we run on empty most of the time. Our spirits become thirsty for some time for ourselves, for time to be with our families, and for time to develop and maintain our relationship with God. Use this time for some Sabbath rest. See it as a gift from God. Remember I invited you to have glass of water nearby at the opening of worship. Take a long, deep drink of your water. Imagine this being the living, healing water that Jesus offered the woman at the well- the water that bubbles up into eternal life.

In addition, to attending to our spiritual lives, stay in contact with neighbors, friends, and people within our congregation. We need human contact. Isolation is not mentally or emotionally healthy. Find out what needs they might have. Share what needs you might have and seek ways to meet our needs.

Fear is a strong emotion caused by great worry about something dangerous, painful, or unknown that is happening or might happen. This coronavirus is an unknown. We have the choice to live with fear or live each day to its fullness. Rely on your faith in Christ Jesus. No matter what happens, the Emmanuel (God-with-us) never abandons us. This is one way in which Christ acts for us. Keep the faith and drink from the well of Living Water daily.

Reflection Questions: What will you do when the going gets tough this week? How will you face your fear with faith? How will you take action?

Resources: *Christ is For Us* by April Yamiasaki