

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Satisfaction"
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(Lent 3)

So much of what motivates many of us is discontent. When we are unhappy with something, that becomes motivation to change. Is that the way it is in your life? I know my father grew up in the Depression years. There were five children, and his father had been crippled in WWI in the trenches. So his mother had to have a part time job and also do most of the household chores. Poverty was palpable in those days. Those were the days when people would put cardboard in the soles of their shoes to get some extra mileage out of them. Many of us have not felt that sting of poverty. My mother's father had lost his job in 1929, and would not get employment for three years. So her family took in young women for room and board at \$5 per month, each. She fed that extended family of six on ten dollars per month. They were different times.

Today, we might complain about having the same meal or even the same kind of food two days in a row. But if you've been hungry for an extended period of time, you know how thankful you are to have anything to eat, whether that hunger is voluntary or involuntary.

Complaining about what we don't have has been a national and international sport for thousands of years. Someone once said that the damage on cave paintings was due to the use of the wooden club from the art critics of the day.

Whining and complaining goes back certainly to the wilderness, the desert of Sin, which was the name of the place as well as a description of the activity in that place. It is thought to exist between Elim and Mt. Sinai in the southwest of the Arabian Peninsula. Massah means "testing" and refers to how the people of God tested God in the wilderness. Meribah, means quarreling or fault-finding, and again refers to how people were relating to God. Of course this often applies to us today, although we also often don't notice when we indeed are fault-finding or complaining. The story is quite simple and short. Those following God were out in the desert where people get thirsty. They were thirsty and complaining about this to Moses. Moses in turn took those complaints to God in prayer. This too is a pattern which

often happens today. Pastors often find themselves in a place where they cannot satisfy those whose expectations are upon them. So they pray.

And God responds. But not necessarily in the way that either the people or the leader expects.

Dissatisfaction leads us to voice what we feel is wrong. The natural thing to do is to say what is on your mind. It was not wrong for the people to say that they were thirsty. That was appropriate. Just like at an Annual Meeting of the church, like what we will have this evening. You should raise your voice if there is something that concerns you, or if there is something for which you are thankful. Raising concerns and needs is a good thing.

It was the next things that they said which were sinful. Some might say the next things they said were logical conclusions to the first statement. They said, "Why has the Lord led us out into the wilderness to die?" And then they demanded Moses to give them water, with a perceived threat of violence against him if he didn't give them what they wanted, that was also over the line of appropriateness. What was happening in the wilderness was seeing how well the people might trust God. How do you act when you are dissatisfied and uncomfortable? What comes out of your mouth? [cell phone story]

Back to the Scriptures. Do you remember that these were the people who saw God perform the nine plagues on Egypt? They saw God lead them out with the valuables of the Egyptians given to them. They saw the army of Pharaoh defeated in the Red Sea or the Reed Sea, either way it was a miracle. They had been slaves, now they were free. They saw the cloud in the day and the pillar of fire at night, a theophany, a clear manifestation of God among the people leading them. They saw many miracles and signs; they asked for bread and got "what is it?" Manna—something like a sesame almond cake on the ground. They asked for meat. And remember we're talking about meat for probably almost a million people, certainly hundreds of thousands. God gave them the quail, so they had meat.

Now it is water. What are you thirsty for? What tugs at your appetite day after day? What is it that you have to have? What makes you complete or whole or gives you a good feeling that you simply must have?

We have lots of water; a beautiful public water supply exists here in St. John's. So probably it's not water. Accomplishments, travel, harmony in relationships, good health, peace, kind words, what is it that you long for?

Do you complain to others that you don't have it? Have you brought that desire to God in prayer? Paul says in Romans 5 that there is a reason for our suffering, but it's not what we expect. I would suggest there is a reason for being keenly aware of our dissatisfactions, because they are akin to suffering, not the same, but perhaps a first cousin. Suffering leads us to endurance, that there is more to our lives than our own desires, more to our lives than a comfortable existence. If we endure our pain, our unfulfilled desires, then our character is built, Paul continues, a godly character of trusting God. That character also includes a hope, hope not in something that we can see or know immediately, but rather see God, trust God who desires to build something into us that we cannot yet see. Even as the master painter or sculptor begins to chip the marble or put strokes of oil on canvas, so we cannot see what will be, but the artist knows where it is going. We have to trust the artist to see the work through to completion, just as we need to trust God to see our lives through to completion.

Jesus was also a master artist. He had a one on one encounter with a person in Samaria, as his disciples went away to get supplies. He went to a well. And he asked the woman for a drink of water, breaking all the cultural prohibitions about men and women talking, about Jews and Samaritans (or part Jews) talking, about Jesus the rabbi, talking with a woman of questionable status. So he risked talking with her. He simply asked for a drink of water. She brings up the fact that Jews and Samaritans don't talk to each other normally, because for centuries they have disagreed over religious truth. Jesus hints at who he is, and begins talking about living water, which also is a hint at who he is. Her imagination is captured and she desires this living water which would spare her trips to the well and give her the deepest of satisfaction. Then Jesus simply turns the conversation away from this for a moment and asks her to bring her husband, an appropriate request, since he has risked talking to her alone at the well. She reveals that she doesn't have a husband and Jesus prophetically tells her that she's been married several times and has a partner who she is not committed to. Then she turns the conversation to the religious differences between the Jews and Samaritans, about worshipping in Samaria and in Jerusalem. Jesus explains it is not about place, but about God. And God can only be understood "in the Spirit" and in truth, or complete honesty. The Holy Spirit has to reveal

to you and to me who God is and how important it is to follow Him. And we have to come completely honestly, which can be difficult, because many of us are tempted to make ourselves look better than we are.

In response to Jesus' teaching about worship, she declares her understanding that the Messiah, the hope of Israel, the promise of David's throne being fulfilled some day. Jesus tells her that he is that person.

She in turn, later on in the story, brings much of the town out to meet him. Many of them believe in him because of what she said about him. She is an unlikely evangelist, broken, possibly an outcast, possibly abused, but wonderfully met and respected by Jesus.

Jesus could have been still talking about how thirsty he was. Instead he meets the thirst, the spiritual thirst of a whole town through this one woman. There is a satisfaction beyond our desires which occurs when we meet Jesus and realize who He is, and also begin to realize who we are. He deals with our shame, our dishonesty, our brilliance or our confusion.

The encounter is meant to encourage us in our honesty before God. Where are we today? Are we confused, hurting? Are we apathetic, not really caring, with our minds somewhere else? Are we searching, but afraid to admit how far we feel we have to go, how immature we are in the faith? Honesty along with the guidance of the Holy Spirit is where worship begins.

So every time you come through the door to the sanctuary, or any church building, or any time of worship anywhere, remember that honesty is the key, and asking God to give His Holy Spirit to help us know Him and taste of the living water, the water that brings life.

We're told that water is the key to greater health and a more healthy weight. So also is it true that we need the living water for our spiritual journey. Ask him for that water; tell him again that you want more of him in your life. Give him the chance to talk to you about honesty and the Holy Spirit's guidance in your life, whether for a move, a job, a relationship, whatever it is.

He meets us all at that well. He doesn't say "satisfaction guaranteed" as so many products do today. The satisfaction is a journey with him, with him as the leader.

Let us pray.