

“To Test(?) or Rest(!)”

Exodus 17:1-7

Psalm 95

John 4:5-42

by

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Ever had test anxiety? That stress and pressure we feel over being tested. That knot in the stomach that leads to our being testy ... and testing others -- in this case, Another.

We should not be too quick to judge the people in the wilderness. For we too test God -- or are tempted to.

Like Eliza Doolittle in “My Fair Lady” singing, “Don’t talk of love, show me!”

We are in a desert of the soul, thirsty and parched. And we say to God, “You said you’d provide for me. Show me!”

We’ve made a mess of our lives. “You said you’d guide me. Show me!”

We’re racing down the road too fast, late to a meeting, endangering our life and others’. “You said you’d protect me. Show me!”

“I know I’m right and you (some other person) are wrong! ‘Surely the Lord is on my side.’ Show me, God, by smiting my enemy.”

We test God. “Prove yourself.” As if God hasn’t done enough for us already.

In doing so, we put ourselves on par with God, in a position to judge God. And, to be quite honest, it just adds to our stress, our anxiety, that knot in the stomach.

We test God? Not appropriate.

But for God to test us? Yes, appropriate ... and we are found wanting.

But notice the approach Psalm 95 suggests.

-listen to God’s voice

Oh, that today you would listen to God’s voice!

-see God’s works

even though they had already seen my works

-know God’s ways

they do not know my ways

-enter God’s rest

They shall not enter into my rest

You see, in putting God to the test, the people missed out on God's rest. We too desire that rest -- a rest we yearn for as well, and yet somehow have missed.

It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water.

Something's not right with this picture. We're not sure exactly why. But something is amiss, out of sync -- restless.

But notice what happens as the story progresses.

--She listens to God's voice...in the voice of Jesus.

She does listen. She may have questions. What she hears may startle her and may not be what she expects, but she does listen: she makes the effort, she takes the time, and is open to hearing what is said, even though what is said be an uncomfortable truth.

What about us? Do we listen to God's voice? In scripture? In our conscience? In others?

--She sees God's works...in how Jesus treats her and responds to her.

He accepts her. He relates to her, even going against several social norms that said it was wrong for a man (especially a rabbi) to talk to a woman in public; that said it was foolish for a Jew to talk to a Samaritan...anytime.

Jesus said to the disciples,

I am fed by doing the will of the one who sent me.

What about us?

Do we see God at work around us, and hear in that the call to join God in that work?

Will we see God at work in others around us, even those we disdain and find suspicious?

It reminds me of a story about another Samaritan, one they call 'good'. The Good Samaritan responds to another human being in need; he -- 'the enemy' -- helps a stranger, even at risk to himself. And Jesus said, "Go and do likewise." Do we see God's work, even in the work of those that do not set right with us?

And notice, in response to the divine action, this Samaritan woman acts: she goes and tells others. It's almost like intuitively she knows what to do, instinctively she knows what she must do: she must tell someone, she must share this goodness.

So that, hearing God's voice and seeing God's works, elicits God's ways.

It is God's way that she goes and tells others, that she shares this encounter of grace.

She may not be fully in God's way: the one she is with is not her husband. Still, as Paul reminds us,

We have this treasure in earthen vessels that it might be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and not to us. (II Corinthians 4)

Our being willing to be touched by an "earthen vessel."

--*She knows God's way.*

She goes and she tells others.

Sounds like something Jesus says to us: "Go and make disciples" (Matthew 28),
"Go and tell others what the Lord has done for you" (Mark 5).

--*She enters God's rest?*

So, she has listened to God's voice -- in the voice of Jesus.

She has seen God's works -- in Jesus.

She has demonstrated she knows, at least in part, something of God's ways.

Can we conclude that she has entered God's rest?

I believe we can, not only in embracing the truth that sets her free, not only in worshiping in spirit and in truth. But also....

Go back to the beginning of the story.

She goes to the well at noon. Why is no one else there? Why is she the only one (besides Jesus) at the well at noon?

Because noontime is the last time anyone would be there: noontime, the heat of the day, the sun blazing down. Anybody in their right mind will go to the well in the morning, or in the evening, when it is cooler.

So why is she at the well at the last time of day anyone else would be there? Because she is the last person anyone would want to meet.

She is an outcast, a pariah, unwanted by the others in the community; a woman of disrepute.

And it is there, at a well at noontime, that she encounters Jesus.

And in that encounter, she hears God's voice, and she sees God work, and she knows God's way.

And she goes to those who have shunned her and tells them -- she shares this goodness.

And they listen.

And in listening to her, they hear God's voice,

And in following her example, they see God at work.

And in meeting the one she met, they know God's way -- they come to know God's way of deliverance.

We have heard for ourselves and know that this one is truly the savior of the world.

And they at least begin to experience God's rest...together, in community.

The one they had shunned talked to them. The one they had shunned they now talk to. And they have come together in that common experience of encounter with God. And they are relating: they are reconciled with one another and resting in communion with God.

It reminds me of a time Jesus spoke about rest:

Come all you who labor and are heavy-laden... take my yoke upon you...

Take his yoke: the yoke that provides instruction, direction for our lives. Could it be instruction

-to hear God's voice

-to see God's works

-to know God's ways, even the way of the cross?

...and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11)

Rest. Together. With him. In community.

Thanks be to God!