

2020 09 27 – Water from the Rock

Exodus 17:1-7

The Israelites camped at Rephidim but found no drinking water. They were very thirsty and complained to Moses. So YHWH told Moses to strike the rock of Horeb and when he did, water began to flow.

Is it possible that water can flow from a rock in the desert? Of course, the answer is yes. In deserts, like the one that the Israelites were traversing, water is scarce but oases exist. An oasis is made fertile by a source of freshwater, usually an underground river called an aquifer. These aquifers are formed when water deep in the ground is trapped between layers of rock. When those aquifers approach the surface natural springs are created. It is very possible that when Moses hit the rock, it cracked, exposing an already existing aquifer.

<https://www.geographyrealm.com/oasis-get-water/>

We all need water. Every being on earth needs water to survive. When water flowed from the rock at Horeb, the Israelites were able to quench their thirst, they were able to drink the water and to use it for cooking and other purposes. We use water too, a lot of water, so where does our water come from? (*pick up glass of water to show everyone*) Where does the water in this glass come from? You probably guessed correctly, it came from my kitchen. Like most of you, I get my drinking water from a tap.

So what is the true source of that water? You may be aware that in Swift Current our water comes from the Duncairn Reservoir, which supplies the Swift Current Reservoir, the source for the city's water treatment plant. The Duncairn Dam was built to dam up the Swift Current Creek. So our water comes from the Swift Current Creek Watershed. This small watershed begins near the Cypress Hills and eventually empties into the South Saskatchewan River north of Stewart Valley. The streams that are a part of this system are fed by spring runoff and ground water. In this area of Saskatchewan, which is, as you know, typically very dry, the water provided from the creek system is critical for drinking water supply, irrigation, livestock production, and recreation.

<https://www.wsask.ca/Global/Water%20Info/Watershed%20Planning/SwiftCurrentCreekWatershedProtectionPlanFinal.pdf>

But the Swift Current Creek Watershed is only a small part of the Hudson Bay Watershed and the Hudson Bay Watershed is one of four major watershed regions in Canada. These four watersheds all drain into the oceans which surround our country on three sides. The water that flows through this city eventually ends up in Hudson Bay and finally the Atlantic Ocean. That means that whatever we put into our water also travels through Manitoba on its way to the rest of the world.

So how do we treat our water? We know that pollution and invasive species are impacting the quality of our water and the creatures that live in and near it. We also know that climate change is reducing the amount of freshwater in our country. All we have to do is drive our roads and see all the dried out sloughs

and dugouts. And yet, in Canada, on average, a typical person consumes over 300 litres of water each day. Only the United States uses more water per capita than Canada and many countries in Europe use less than half. In other words, we use more than our share of the world's water.

<http://www.saskh20.ca/PDF/WaterUseInYourHome.pdf>

Our First Nations brothers and sisters lived in harmony with the water and the land thousands of years before most of our ancestors arrived in North America. I want to share one of their traditional stories from the Arctic Watershed. In that watershed is the Mackenzie River, the longest and largest river system in Canada. The Dene call it “big river.” This is their legend:

Elders say that every creek or water flowing into the big river has a story behind it. They tell stories of how certain hills or landmarks along the river were formed. Every Dene learned early in life just how important the environment, the galaxy, and especially water is to people, land, and animals. Put simply: Without water, there is no life!

One story many Dene groups share is that of Yamoria, or one who walked around Earth: the greatest medicine man who came to the Dene long ago. He brought teachings and laws to the Dene that changed their lives. These teachings stress respect, caring for one another, and living in peace and harmony. Depending on where a person lived, the story may differ a bit, but the lessons are unquestionable!

When the world was new, it is believed there was a family of giant beavers who were terrorizing the land [and water] and killing the Dene people on

Sahtu or Great Bear Lake. Yamoria was asked to help. He began chasing the beavers down Sahtu de or Bear River, and caught up with them at the mouth of the river at Tulita. Yamoria killed the three giant beavers with a bow and arrow, skinned them, and stretched their hides on the Great Bear Rock.

To this day, you can still see the outline of the beaver pelts on Bear Rock. The arrows that Yamoria shot are still seen each spring where the Great Bear River and the Mackenzie River meet—the poles are still sticking out of the river. Further up the Mackenzie River, Yamoria cooked beaver meat and the beaver's grease dripped into the fire. It is said that the fire continues to burn near Tulita.

The story has been passed on for generations. It teaches respect, harmony, and living in peace with land and water.

Despite attempts to take care of the land and water, the Dene notice a number of changes in the mighty Mackenzie. Pollution is affecting fish and other living creatures. Climate change is melting permafrost, causing more and more landslides into the river. But the biggest concern is water level. It has dropped to the point where there is concern for barges being able to deliver essentials to communities. Many are saying it may be time to return to the teachings of our ancestors to preserve and protect the land, sky, and water. <https://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/creation-time-reconciliation-watershed.docx>

The Dene people are concerned about the Arctic Watershed and believe that they need to take action to protect it. So I ask you, “What can we do to protect our watershed? Who or what are the “giant beavers” that are terrorizing southwest Saskatchewan? What can we do to make a difference?” I believe the first step is become aware of the issues, to connect with groups like the Swift Current Creek Watershed Stewards. This is a group of volunteers who work to educate, to advocate and to do their part to protect our source of water. They organize demonstration projects, workshops and field days, publications and a student education program. Through groups like this, we are encouraged to reduce consumption, to be aware of what we put down our drain and allow to enter our watershed. <http://www.sccws.com/home.html>

Yes, YHWH provided water when the Israelites were thirsty. But in order for the water to be found, YHWH needed Moses to go to Horeb and to strike the rock. Moses had to listen and to follow God’s word. The Creator, the Spirit of Love, depends on us to care for the land and the water that we have been given.

Let us pray

We are grateful, Creator, for sacred water that flows in our bodies and through the Earth. Water is a powerful force that creates and destroys, sustains and erodes, deposits and washes away. Forgive us for all the ways that we have wasted, polluted, and ignored precious water. And help us restore good relations, remembering that Water is Life. Amen

<https://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/creation-time-reconciliation-watershed.docx>