

We often use the phrase “between a rock and a hard place” to describe a dilemma – a decision that must be made between two difficult alternatives.

In some ways, it describes this past week for many community leaders, faced with the decision to risk spreading the COVID-19 virus or to risk loss of work, income, learning, or service.

In nearly 35 years of ministry, this is the first time that I have experienced worship being suspended with such uncertainty.

But it is not the first time in history, and even God’s people wandering in the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land had to suspend their covenant rituals for a generation.

Which brings us to today’s rock and hard place.

The rock is the one near Horeb, later renamed Massah and Meribah.

And the hard place is the stubborn, stiff-necked, whining and complaining people of God.

“What shall I do with this people?” Moses laments to the Lord.

And because the Lord God is building a covenant relationship with this people,

a relationship that demands trust and faithfulness,

**God creates life between the rock and the hard place.**

The Lord provides gushing water from that rock so that the people can drink.

What happened here in the wilderness was much more than just a physical response to a physical need, however.

It was also a spiritual response to a spiritual need – the Lord God responding to the people's anxiety about whether this God and his leader Moses could be trusted.

Now, mind you, the scriptures do not tell us that the water that gushed from this rock was Perrier, or Evian or Fiji. It may have been more like the awful sulfuric water at New York rest stops on the way to Schenectady.

But it was life-giving water. Water provided by God, the creator and covenant maker of his people.

And it was water provided by God's Word of promise and command, carried out by Moses and witnessed by the elders of the people.

Because of this Word, because of Moses' obedience, and because of God's faithfulness to the covenant, the people did not die of thirst in the wilderness.

They made it to the Promised Land and from their many descendants came one, named Jesus – Savior.

By the time of Jesus, the one people who were delivered from slavery in Egypt and led by God through the wilderness into the Promised Land,

Had divided on several fronts – political, geographical, and theological.

The Samaritans had once been members of that unified covenant people, but since they did not adhere to the Word of God beyond the books of Moses, as one example, they were cast out of the mainstream Jewish community.

So, by the time of Jesus, Jews and Samaritans – as the woman at the well reminds us – had nothing to do with one another.

Jesus isn't even supposed to be here. Most Jews would have crossed the river to avoid going through Samaria.

How radically surprising, then, that we find here in John 4, another rock and hard place situation.

The rock being the Samaritan woman and the hard place being the prohibitions for Jesus, a Jewish man.

In the wilderness, Moses struck the rock with his staff.

Here in Samaria, Jesus cracks the rock by striking up conversation.

Give me a drink.

By asking for water, Jesus humbles himself, obliterating the human power dynamic of man and woman, Jew and Samaritan, and opening the possibility for the relationship of God and believer.

The woman is already marginalized – she does not get her water in the morning with the other women because she is, shall we say, untraditional.

So she doesn't want to give cause for even more gossip by entertaining Jesus.

But he continues to strike at the rock of her own stubbornness.

"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

Living water – water of life – gushing water – sparkling water – better than Fiji or Perrier – or even the ancient water of Jacob's well.

Jesus does not mean physical water, but that same spiritual water the Lord God gave in the wilderness – the Word that assures us that God is trustworthy, faithful, and gives life, even life beyond death.

those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

We can almost see the wheels of the woman's mind turning as she tries to make sense of Jesus' words, but she is still not quite with him.

Still not quite ready to make the leap from the physical to the spiritual, from the past to the present.

So Jesus continues to strike at the rock of her unbelief by telling her what he knows of her – describing her sordid relationship history.

By baby steps, she comes to an uncertain faith – acknowledging Jesus as a prophet,

"I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us."

But then hearing the full freight of God's Word when with one final strike, Jesus said to her, "I am, the one who is speaking to you."

I AM – the name of the holy God, in whose presence no one lives – is the name of Jesus – the Messiah, the Savior.

No wonder this woman drops her water jar and runs off to tell people –  
*Come and see this man – could he be the Messiah?*

Jesus is the living water now gushing between the rock and the hard place.

He is the source of life and salvation for all people.

The living water Jesus gives refreshes all who engage him as the Word of God.

By the end of this story, *many more believed because of his word. 42 They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."*

We, dear Christians, are to be like the Samaritan Woman who went and told everyone "Come and see this man whose words are worth hearing."

It is not our job to persuade and convince and argue and insist that we are right and they are wrong,

But to tell what we know and invite them to come and see for themselves the Savior who forgives sins, gives life in his own body and blood, and provides the living water of his Word and Holy Spirit.

Even now, in this time of being physically apart because of a virus,

we can overflow with the living water of eternal life through telephone calls, emails, and letters

testifying to the faithful God who has triumphed over death.

With Jesus, there is always life between the rock and the hard place.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit Amen.