

## **Water from the Rock Numbers**

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If you are looking for some naturalistic explanation of this story you could wait a very long time. No matter how much time you spend examining rocks, water sources or dousing rods, it will not help you when it comes to this story. And that's because this story takes us outside the realm of the familiar or possible - like one of the characters in the movie *Princess Bride* who repeats *ad nauseum*: "Inconceivable!"

Moses has led the people out of tyranny and slavery into freedom, but that freedom is full of danger and deprivation. Just because you're free, don't think that means easy. In fact, freedom often means harder. The people are so cranky that the place is named Meribah, which means, "they quarreled."

Moses and Aaron are so troubled by the attitudes of the people that they go outside the camp and fall down on their faces before the tabernacle, their portable chapel. What to do?

The rather shocking answer comes: Take up your staff and go where I will show you. So Moses did just that and when he struck the rock where X marks the spot, water gushed out like a fire hydrant in the city on a summer day.

You might as well stop now trying to make sense of that in a naturalistic way. There is no answer, not that way. Oh, people have tried to make it work – geologic formations, hidden springs. You name it. But that's really not the force behind this story. What could it be?

Of course, the simple message is that God provides and we need to trust. Clear enough. But God can provide in lots of ways: rain storms, a traveling water tanker, a spring bursting forth from the sand, a franchise on bottled water, desalinization of salt water, frozen ice crystals that melt, or an aqueduct to the mountains. God can provide in lots of ways.

But this story chooses, yes, the inconceivable way: Strike the rock and water comes from the rock.

But that doesn't happen, at least not that we know. How can water come from a rock?

This story acts like a *koan*, a paradoxical saying that rattles our cognitive cage: When I need help I go looking in predictable places, but this says to look in the unpredictable places. I look for my answers in logical places but this says to trust the non-rational solutions. I'm looking for something fluid, but this says to look for something solid. And most importantly, I want to create my own solutions, but this says trust the way God provides and the people God provides for us.

There is great power hiding beneath the appearance of things, beyond what our five senses can detect. Surprising answers come when we stay open to knowing in a different kind of way. And if this story has a double meaning (and they almost always do) and is also about the soul then we really need to be open to the unexpected ways that we are healed, inspired and transformed.

If you have seen the movie, *Collateral Beauty*, that gets close to it. The movie plays with the ways that truth surfaces from beneath the hard surfaces of life – the hard surface of suffering and grief, the inevitable surface of death, the paradoxical surface of love, and tyrannical surface of ever-moving time.

Beneath all of these – suffering, death, love and time – miracles are present, even beautiful.

And so the miracle in the wilderness is that when the people complain about the immediate thing they are taken to an entirely different place of awareness that gives them an answer they never could have imagined.

The answer you are seeking may not be found in the places where you are looking. The answer is to be found in what *you cannot yet imagine*, like water from a rock.

Sometimes you have to go without what you've taken for granted before you are ready to receive the gift that comes in a different way.

It is like suffering in our lives. We of course would rather choose pleasure and enjoyment, happiness and security, but when suffering comes it reveals the fragile nature of these lives we inhabit, and many times our suffering unmasks the truth of our lives and gives room for the divine light to pour in.

It is the same thing as when we look at the cross and behold what evil can do and then see the love of God pouring out from around the edges of the broken body. Paul said that God's wisdom is best known among the foolishness we carry and God's strength stands out against the backdrop of our weakness. This is how we know it, not when our schemes come together but when God brings water from the unmovable rock in our lives.

We are thirsty, needy, quarrelsome, and tempted to give up, but somehow the miracle of God's love leads us to the rock that seems to be so impenetrable, insurmountable and unmovable. We cannot do anything with it ourselves but with one tap of grace the rock opens to bring forth living water, just like Jesus told the Samaritan woman at

the well. She kept asking for the water that wouldn't run out and Jesus just kept telling her that hiding behind her expectation was "living water" that bubbles up like a spring to eternal life. It wasn't what she was looking for but everything she needed.

When you don't have the answers or know what direction to turn it may be because you have a certain expectation in your mind about the way you want things to go. You have this desire, this attachment to an idea, but when that particular idea doesn't come you are dismayed and disappointed. The real solution, the water from the rock, doesn't look like anything you expected or anticipated. That's why staying open to whatever God brings is so critical.

If we are shown a rock wall we may feel there is no way out or no way forward, just a stony barrier, the rocky silence. But what if that rock can open? What if it rolls away to reveal an empty tomb behind it? What if water pours out that is living water?

I don't know which character you identify with in this story.

Are you the one stranded in the wilderness, hungry and thirsty for what you need, for what you don't even know? Are you quarrelsome and longing for something different? Do you just want a way out of this mess and are ready to do something even if you are not sure what? Have you forgotten what you believe in, once hoped for, who you are and are meant to be?

Or are you like Moses, baffled by those around you, hoping they will return to their senses, uncertain about what you can do to help? Do you feel the burden of leadership and responsibility? Are you weary of people looking to you for the answers?

I'm not even going to ask who among us identifies with God, are living in some God complex that you believe you are the savior of the world. I have a number for you to call if that's where you are!

But instead have a suggestion: I invite you to do something imaginative. I invite you to identify *with the rock*. For a moment, let go of the thrashing, the grasping, leading or following, needing to control, figuring out or finding solutions.

I invite you to close your eyes, take a deep breath and let go of all that. Settle down and *be the rock*. Simply be the rock that has a spring hiding inside. Wait for the tap of grace and feel the water flowing up and out and into the world. Be the rock of ages, the rock of grace. Feel how solid you are, solid and fluid at the same time. Now wait for what's coming next. Feel the patience of antiquity. Be content where you are. Know you have what you need.

*Wash, O God, your sons and daughters  
Newborn creatures of your womb  
Number them among your people  
Raise like Christ from death and tomb*