

“God’s Love and Provision Despite Us”

(8 March 2026 – Third Sunday in Lent)

Readings: Exodus 17: 1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5: 1-11; John 4: 5-42

Introduction

We all come from families – some close-knit; some estranged; some small and some extended; and some nearby and some (like me) distant. Normally, family members look after and provide for each other, although some find this difficult. (And apologies if I have brought up trauma and/or unkind memories.) For myself, when I was a small boy, my parents always provided for me because I was their son, despite what I did or didn’t do. I never doubted my parents love or that they would provide me food, clothing and shelter – although these days I wonder if my parents had the same view? Especially, now knowing I have gone through periods questioning whether I could provide for my family.

Christians, that is we who are in Christ Jesus, have a Heavenly Father who provides for us – sometimes directly, but in many cases through the agency of others. In today’s readings there are a number of themes, but a common theme is that God provides, even if there is ingratitude and lack of trust, or poor knowledge of, or misunderstanding about God, or a supposed outsider, or hostility and disobedience. God provides for us, sometimes despite us, because of His great love and commitment to us and for us.

Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95

In the Exodus reading we see that God provided regardless of the grumbling by His people. Despite experiencing God’s provision in the immediate past (e.g., providing manna and quail for food, see Exodus 16) they still quarrelled with Moses and put God to the test (v2).

This is attested in the Psalm set for today (Psalm 95 – the Venite in Morning Prayer), where we are told of the greatness and sovereignty of God (Ps95:3-4), the Rock of our Salvation (v1), the creator of all things (v4-6), who cares for His people (v7); and we are to come before Him in humble worship (v6) with triumphant shouts (v1) and joyful songs and psalms (v2).

And yet, with reference to the incident at the Rephidim encampment from today's Exodus reading, the Psalmist warns us, not to harden our hearts and test the LORD, like His people; who had seen His prior works and erred in their hearts due to their lack of faith and obedience (Ps95:8-10). There were consequences for this lack. For forty years God loathed that generation because of their poor decisions and actions, which led to Him making an oath in His wrath that: "They shall not enter my rest" (v10-11). Yet, God still provided, not because of the people's worthiness, but because of His love for His people was unwavering, He remained committed to them.

John 4: 5-42

The Gospel reading is the account commonly known as the "Woman at the Well". In it God's provision has a more spiritual dimension. That is, God's care for us goes well beyond our physical needs to our need for spiritual sustenance and growth – again despite us. The passage is lengthy and is based around two conversations Jesus has one after the other. The first, a longer conversation with an unnamed Samaritan woman; the second, a shorter conversation with his disciples. Both conversations start with physical items (water and food) and end with a spiritual dimension.

To help us understand what the passage tells us, there are four important issues to note. First, in the Middle East of that time, Jesus breaks two social conventions

when he speaks with an unnamed Samaritan woman. Not only did men not start conversations with unknown women, the woman was also a Samaritan, and Jews did not have contact with Samaritans (v9).

The second issue is a disagreement around the location of where to worship God. For the Jews it is Jerusalem, and for the Samaritans it was Mt Gerizim, where there'd once been a temple. The Mt Gerizim temple was destroyed about 128 BC, but the Samaritans continued to worship on that mountain.

A third issue is the differing knowledge and understanding of God between the two communities. For the Samaritans, the Scriptures only comprised of the Pentateuch – the first five books of the OT – not the other OT books. Thus, as far as the Jews were concerned the Samaritans had an incomplete knowledge and understanding of God. Even so, the Samaritans, like the Jews, were anticipating the Messiah. The Samaritan's called their Messiah "*Ta'heb*" ("the one who returns"), a teacher who "will proclaim (explain) all things to us" (v25).

Finally, there are a number of expressions used in the passage which have double meanings – one on a more physical or earthly level and the other on a decidedly spiritual level. The woman, and later the disciples, thought on the physical plane, whereas Jesus speaks on a spiritual level.

In the first conversation about water. Jesus request for water, turns into a spiritual discussion when He says to the woman "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink" (v10). The gift being "living water" (v10), "a spring welling up to eternal life" (v14). Here "living water" has a double meaning. It can mean fresh, running water, as a spring, or it can mean spiritual or life-giving water. In the conversation, the woman sees the first (physical) meaning – she wants that water to slake her thirst. Jesus though speaks of water

as the second meaning. For Him the spiritual “gift of God” – “water welling up to eternal life”. Jesus is both inviting the woman into a saving relationship with God and also teaching her – increasing her knowledge and understanding of God.

The conversation moves on to the touchy subject of places of worship. Jesus turns the perspective of the conversation from the place of worship to the object of worship, that is the person who is to be worshipped – the Father. He tells her that “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (v23), for “God is Spirit” (v24). Thus, with the coming of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, location is less relevant. What is relevant, is that the Father is worshipped “in the Spirit and in truth”.

Finally, the conversation ends with a discussion on the coming of the Messiah. Jesus declares to her that He is the Messiah. But which Messiah? her conventional understanding is being challenged and so she is uncertain.

The disciples return and the woman leaves, and despite her uncertainty she calls the townspeople to “Come and see” ... “Could this be the Christ (Messiah)?” (v29). And while this is happening, Jesus has a discussion with the disciples about food. The disciples think of physical food and whether someone had already given Jesus food. Whereas, Jesus uses a spiritual dimension to food in a vocational sense that His food “is to do the will” of the Father who sent Him “and to finish His work” (v34).

Based on the witness of the woman, the townspeople come to see Jesus. Many come to believe in Jesus now, because of their personal contact with Him over a two-day period. They come to know that He is the real “Saviour of the World” (v42). This is an example where God provides His (spiritual) gift of “living water” – “eternal life” – which is here being offered to the Samaritans (Gentiles),

to those considered to have a poor understanding of God with a different way of worshipping God.

Romans 5:1-11

The Epistle reading also talks of God's provision in a spiritual way and pushes further the issues of eternal life, even where there is enmity between God and people.

The Roman's passage starts: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" (vv1-2). Continuing, this "hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (v5).

But we are told that once "we were God's enemies" (v10), a state of enmity once existed between us and God. The enmity goes both ways, us and God. From our side, we rebelled against God. From God's side, His established position against evil and sin, shown in the "God's wrath" (v9).

So how did we come to this position of being justified, of being reconciled and thus having peace with God and having hope, and of having the Holy Spirit poured into us? Paul tells us that "when we were still powerless" (to do anything about our situation) (v6), "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we still sinners, Christ died for us" (v8). We were once "God's enemies" because we were "sinners", but God's love was such that His Son, our Lord Jesus, died for us, reconciling us to God (v10), granting us peace (v1), and saving us from "God's wrath". This is something worth celebrating, "rejoicing in God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (v11).

Conclusion

What is our response to God's provision – not only for our physical needs, but also socially and importantly spiritually? How do we show our gratitude? What is it we can give God in our turn? What is a proper response to Jesus' death on the cross and pouring out of the Holy Spirit into us? First, in this season of Lent, in our preparation for Easter, we must place our faith in Jesus and keep our focus on Him, the cross and resurrection, and be filled by the Holy Spirit through whom God's love poured into our hearts. Through the Holy Spirit, we can truly worship the Father – whom we worship in the Spirit and in truth.

In this we celebrate, “rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ”. Because while we were enemies, Jesus died for us and the whole world. We are justified, reconciled to God, have peace with God, saved and healed, eternal life, living waters, hope. We are reconciled to God in a deeply personal way in and through our Lord Jesus the Christ, where we have a personal knowledge and love of God. Our knowledge and love of God comes from God's knowledge and love of us.

Jesus treated the Samaritan woman and villagers with respect, as humans, worthy recipients of God's grace, and not as the “other”. We are challenged by and must be mindful of any barriers or boundaries that we may place between ourselves and other people of what is acceptable or not. The woman didn't have perfect knowledge of, or about, God. In her witness to the villagers, she just spoke of her experience. We need only to do the same. God loves and provides for us, always despite us.