

Oasis

The Israelites weren't the only people to wander through a desert, searching high and low for life, true life...something to give them hope in the midst of their hunger and thirst. They weren't the only ones to ever do this, but their story of wandering in the desert remains a supremely important tale for us today. They trusted in Moses, as the God-ordained leader, to take them from slavery and lead them to the Promised Land. But, within the wilderness, they encountered hunger and thirst...deep hunger and thirst that made them wish for death. They wondered aloud about the Lord's plan, and they questioned the very leader whom they once witnessed part the Red Sea with a staff. They witnessed miracles, but they couldn't see past the pain of their day to day experience.

The people of the modern world find themselves in a desert, too. We actually do live in a literal desert, but that's not what I mean. I mean the world, at large, is a desert. Though we see signs of hopes, and hear stories of inspiration, it seems that, by and large, the world is bereft of the water of life, living amidst the ruins brought about by poverty, famine, violence, and deep ideological conflict. The people of the world have witnessed miracles of a sort, time and time again, but new threats arise, new experiences and tragedies occur, new divisions emerge within the human family that threaten to trample down the good that occurs and position evil and suffering upon the pedestal of normalcy. Just as the Israelites cried out in the desert, "*Give us water to drink,*" so too the world cries out, "Give us the water of life."

In spite of its flawed history, in spite of the ways in which it hasn't remained faithful to Jesus Christ, I still remain convinced that the Church, the baptized people of God empowered by the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, is the best hope for people dying of thirst in

the desert of the modern world. The Church, whose chief cornerstone is Jesus Christ, is planted firmly within the desert of the world and contains within itself the water of life, the living presence of Jesus Christ, the liberator, redeemer, and savior of the world. The Church Universal, and every local expression of that reality, is not a social club, or merely a social service agency. We are not primarily an institution, or a business. The Church happens when the baptized people of God gather to worship, to be taught, to hear the life-giving words of the Gospel, and are empowered to then go out into the world making disciples, bringing people into the fold, introducing once lost and floundering people to the one and only savior of the world, Jesus Christ. Like the rock struck by Moses, we are in the midst of the desert, in the midst of the people, and that water of life within us can flow out and slake the thirsts of all those who feel overcome by the pain and sinfulness of the world.

But there's a catch. The rock that gushed forth with living water...it was first struck and, as I can't help but imagine it, broken open. Though the Lord ordained that the rock would produce water for the thirsty Israelites, it wasn't without labor, without effort. It took Moses and his breaking it open in order to reveal the treasure hidden within. The implication, then, for the Church, is that this treasure that we possess, the living water of Jesus Christ, doesn't simply just flow into the world, a kind of divine osmosis. It requires that we be broken open, that we resist remaining as lifeless as a rock in the sand, that we allow the Lord to do with us as he deems fit, even if at first the will of the Lord seems as non-sensical as calling forth water from a sunbaked rock in the desert.

This is true for the Church Universal, and it's true for us at Trinity on the Hill. If we truly desire to offer the water of life to the community of Los Alamos, we need to be broken open, to more clearly understand and articulate the mission and vision of this parish, to better

grasp what's within us, and what makes us truly unique as a parish community. Today begins the process by which we hope to do just that...to discern how God is calling us to act, to discern who God is calling us to be...to trust that the Holy Spirit will shape and mold our parish into precisely the kind of parish God wants us to be. You see, being broken up isn't a bad thing. It doesn't mean being crushed beyond repair. It means becoming more open to the direction and leadership of Jesus Christ, who then takes the raw material of Trinity on the Hill and shapes it to be a bright beacon of light for this community. Through the guidance of Jeannette McDonald and the Episcopal Church Foundation, the leadership of the Vestry and the Discernment Committee, and the honesty and prayerfulness of every member of this congregation, God will do some new and exciting things in our midst. God can, and will, use this parish to more faithfully offer the water of life to the world around us...to use us as a guiding beacon of light that offers the hope and transformation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the hurting world around us. This is an extraordinarily exciting time in the life of our parish. If God can take a dry rock, buried within the sand of a desert, and bring forth flowing water from it, just imagine what God will do with our parish through this process of prayerful discernment, honest conversation, and hopeful planning? The possibilities are nearly limitless! My hope is that we all remain open to the working of the Holy Spirit in our midst through this process of Strategic Visioning. When those in our community cry out in the desert wilderness of their lives, "Give us water to drink," my prayer is that they see us as a fountain from which they can drink of the living water of Jesus Christ.