

Water for all? – Exodus 17: 1-7 (Psalm 65: 8-13)
Sunday 01/09/19, 11.00 Sunday Praise



The Sinai desert is rocky, mountainous and extremely dry. The valleys are mainly narrow, the mountainsides precipitous: rock faces rise like knife-edges from the valley floors. It's not a place to take a crowd, let alone a whole

nation – Hebrew refugees escaping from Egypt. Surely Moses was irresponsible! Didn't he do a risk assessment? They were not kangaroo rats or tardigrades that can re-hydrate themselves at will! They're human beings who can only survive about three days without water. It's no surprise they complained. But they had big lessons to learn. God had done the most extraordinary things for them in escaping from



slavery in Egypt, but they must not take God for granted. And they must not even take water for granted either. When they see water flowing from the rock, they know it is God who has provided for them.



The Israelites looked back with nostalgia on their former lives in Egypt, where the annual flood waters of the Nile provided abundant harvest. (On the next picture, two donkeys are barely visible under the



great load of straw they bear: that's abundance.) Psalm 65 recognised God as the source of abundance: 'You visit the earth and water it; you make it very plenteous. You drench the furrows and smooth out the ridges. You soften the ground with showers and bless its increase.' God loves to provide abundantly. But don't presume upon it. It can be withdrawn. Be thankful, for gratitude is a great way to show you're not taking God for granted.



For me, it brings back a memory from some thirty years ago: I was on an expedition in a semi-desert area in Kenya. We were in a Land Cruiser on a mud track, miles from anywhere, and had paused to check something on the vehicle. One of our water containers on the roof rack was leaking because of the heat. A woman, who'd obviously walked for miles and miles came up through dust behind us. She gestured to ask for water, which we were happy to give. But what I remember is that before cupping her hands to take water dripping from the container, she paused to give thanks. She said grace. And then she drank with the deepest satisfaction. That is to treasure and cherish water. It is our greatest resource.

There's a word in the Psalm I love: 'plenteous' – it means enough and more than enough. That's what God provides. Even if only 3% of the total water in the world is fresh, and two thirds of that is locked up in glaciers, there's still plenty to go around. But large parts of the world are 'water stressed areas' – there's regularly not enough at least in one month in the year.



There are many causes, but behind them is the fact that humans are not happy with enough, but exploit resources beyond their capacity to renew themselves naturally. It can be because of agricultural or industrial processes. (The pictures show cotton-growing and paper-making, two big users.) It can be because of population growth and the size of cities; it can be because of climate change and dramatic weather events; it can be because of rubbish and pollution in rivers and streams. But one way or another one in ten of the world's population do no safe access to fresh water.

And of course, some people are worse affected than others. Here's a one-minute film from Water Aid to explain water inequality.

FILM: see Water Aid website

So what should we do?

- First of all, we should cherish the water we have. Value every drop. Enjoy it. Be thankful for it.
- Second, cut waste. When we're thankful, this comes naturally. Shorten our showers, for example. Collect rain water for the garden. (I hope in church we can at least get a water butt or two.)
- Third, buy water-wise products: It's not always obvious but think about what we buy in terms of water impact. For example, organics (whether food or cotton clothes)

are likely to have less water impact. They won't carry pesticides into rivers, which then poison the water, for example.

- Fourth, support those, like Water Aid, and other charities who work in water stressed areas.
- Work together – individuals, charities, the commercial sector and governments with overseas aid, all need to pull together if the ambition (and UN development target) of safe fresh water for all by 2030. It is happening: since 1990 2.6 billion people have been helped, but 663 million still have to drink unprotected water.

'God visits the earth and waters it.' As God's people, we are not expected to hoard what God gives for ourselves. Instead, we must be stewards of God's gifts, for the sake of the whole planet.

