

Back in 1995, my family took a trip to Kenya.

I was 8 years old, my brother was 11 years old and my mom was about 6 months pregnant with my younger brother, Malcolm.

So, why in the world did my parents think it was a good idea to take 2 young children and a pregnant woman to Kenya?

Well, my dad's sister, my aunt Victoria, was working there at the time as an epidemiologist.

She started a non-profit organization to help stop the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Victoria was living in Kenya with her husband and their 4 sons, so my parents thought it would be a nice family vacation to go visit them.

And it was nice.

Until one day.

My parents had taken my brother, my four cousins and me on a safari trip.

We were driving back from Serengeti National Park, to Nairobi, Kenya.

Were traveling in an old Jeep Wagoneer, bouncing along on a hot day, down a dusty, dry, unpaved road.

My parents were in the front seats, the 6 of us kids were in the back.

I was the only girl, and I was the youngest.

Well, all of a sudden, steam starts coming up from under the hood, and we can tell the engine is overheating.

So, my dad pulls over and somehow found out that the radiator had a leak in it.

Thankfully, we had a big plastic jug, and my mom says she will stay with us kids, while my dad goes off to find water, in this dry, barren wasteland.

At this point, all of us kids start to panic, we see our lives flash before our eyes and we are scared.

So my mother, being the good mom she is, looks for something to distract us from our current crisis.

Off in the distance, she sees a hill and decides to keep us occupied by taking a walk up to this hill, hoping this “adventure” will entertain us.

Keep in mind, she’s still 6 months pregnant.

But wouldn’t you know that at the top of the hill, on the other side, was a pond that you couldn’t see from the road.

So she calls for my dad, he climbs the hill, fills the jug, takes it back to the car, fills the radiator, and we are on our way.

A bit later, the engine starts to overheat again, and we need water, again.

So my dad pulls over, and commences the search for water, literally, in the desert.

Well, it turns out that we were driving through the land where Maasai people live, but we didn't know this because you couldn't see their villages from the road.

Well, about 10 minutes after we stopped, all of a sudden we start to see people walking towards the car, slowly, cautiously.

They're coming from all directions.

Now, it makes sense that they'd be curious as to who we were.

I don't think it was everyday that they saw a old Wagoneer drive by, full of white people, and more specifically, 2 white adults, one of them pregnant, with 6 white children in tow.

My mother, at this point, is terrified as to what's going to happen to us.

She keeps us kids in the car and sends my father, the tribute, apparently, to talk to the people.

They don't speak English, but he quickly conveys what he needs and why we are stopped.

They start to smile, beckon him to come with them, and he starts to walk away from the car, towards their village.

My mom told me later that, at this point, she was a little worried she might never see him again.

But anyways, he goes with them back to their village, where my dad said they had a pump for water.

So they helped him fill his jug, he carried it all the way back, filled the radiator, and we were on our way.

Now, it happened one more time that we had to fill our water jug before getting home to Nairobi.

By this time, the tantrum levels among all of us kids have reached a breaking point.

We were scared, cranky, hungry, thirsty, and tired.

All 6 of us, in the back of this old suv, were whining and crying to my parents about how miserable we were.

It was not a pleasant sight.

It was supposed to take about 4 hours to get home, it ended up taking twice that long.

So, at this last stop for water, it's now dark.

We pull over.

We see two men walking towards us (my mom later told me that they were in white shirts and looks sort of angelic).

Well, my dad approaches them, explains to them what we need, and they, of course, have a solution.

Again, my mom is afraid it might cost us my dad's life, but you know, tradeoffs.

So, at the edge of the road is a gully that's about 40 feet deep.

It's full of high grass.

At the bottom of the gully, they show my dad a very narrow white pvc pipe.

Now, these two men lead my dad to a certain place in this long pipe, which had a fitting, and could be separated.

So, they take off the fitting, separate the pipe, fill the jug with water now streaming out of the pipe, then put the pipe back together and help my dad fill the radiator.

My dad now tries to offer them some money as a gesture of gratitude for their help.

And in response to my dad's offer, they said, "Oh, no, no, we can't take your money. We're Christians."

And then they shook my parents' hands and walked away.

Eventually we made it back to Nairobi.

So, I shared this story with you, because I thought it had some themes that were similar to the ones we heard in our scripture this morning,

namely, the wilderness, desperation, the need for water (either for thirsty people or a thirsty radiator), and also, miracles.

Moses made water spring forth out of a rock after he struck it with his staff.

We found water in a hidden pond, from a pump in a Maasai village and in the break of a thin pvc pipe at the bottom of a gully.

I also can't help but compare my dad to Moses and us kids to those petulant Israelites.

I get that desperation causes us to do and say things that we aren't proud of, but the Israelites accused Moses of wanting to kill them!

The text says that they complained against Moses and asked him, "*Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?*"

We don't know if it's a rhetorical question or not, but either way it's pretty ridiculous.

They were implying that Moses wasn't trying, that he didn't want to get to the Promised Land, that somehow he deceived them for some ridiculous reason,

as if he *wanted* to be tasked with leading hundreds of people out of slavery in Egypt and into the unknown wilderness.

So, they complain to him, and he in turn complains to God and says, in my interpretation,

*“What do you want me to do with these people?!*

*They’re ready to stone me!*

*And while were at it, God, I was happy leading sheep, thankyouverymuch.”*

It’s at this point that God responds and tells him to take some elders to the rock at Horeb, where he should strike it and water will come out.

But the problem is that these Israelites are so doubtful of God and Moses, even though, by this point, that duo has saved their lives many times over.

For one thing, they saw all the plagues that God brought upon Egypt to get Pharaoh to let them go.

They experienced God’s protection from the pursuing Egyptian army, with the parting of the Red Sea and all that.

They also just received manna and quail that literally rained down from heaven.

So, I don’t know, I think that God and Moses have done enough to prove that they can, and will, take care of the Israelites in the desert.

They didn’t bring them out there and go through all that just to kill them.

That would make no sense.

But again, they are thirty and desperate, and desperation can cause us to do things we aren't proud of.

So, this week we are continuing what seems to have turned into our Lenten theme, which is, how to respond when we are desperate or conflicted.

The first week, we talked about Jesus' temptation in the wilderness.

The moral of that story was, don't give into Satan even when you are hungry and starving, rely on God, even and especially at your lowest moment.

Last week we heard the story of Nicodemus going to visit Jesus in the middle of the night and Jesus told him that we have to be reborn as followers of Christ.

Nicodemus was conflicted between his identity as a leader in Jesus' opposition party, the Pharisees, and as Jesus' disciple.

But he summoned the courage to defend Jesus in front of all his peers and take the risk of anointing Jesus' body for burial after his crucifixion.

The moral of that story was that even when we are conflicted with competing identities or motivations in our lives, always make the decision, which puts your trust in God. Always.

Today's moral is, trust that God is present in the process, even in your misery.



And trust the people around you who are able to point you to God's loving kindness, even when you can't see it yourself, even when you question God's faithfulness.

I think God asked Moses to take the elders with him to the rock at Horeb so that they could testify to what Moses did.

So that they could vouch for him, and the miracle of the water coming out of the rock, when all those Israelites came to him full of bewilderment.

Those elders were needed to testify to God's salvific love, to a bunch of people who thought they'd been abandoned in the wilderness.

If you are at a place where you feel desperate, alone in the desert, abandoned, look for the people or the signs that are pointing you to God's abiding love.

For my family in the desert in Kenya, it was a hidden pond, it was two men in white shirts on the side of the road who knew exactly where the break in the pipe was, and it was kind, hospitable people from the Maasai tribe.

For the Israelites, it was Moses and the elders and the water springing forth from a rock.

God is using people and situations to tell you that you will come out on the other side, and that God is with you on the journey.

Who are the people, what are the signs, for you, in your life?

Look for them. Listen to them. Amen.