

Pentecost 3 6/14/2026
Exodus 19:2-8 6A

THEY SET OUT FROM REPHIDIM

Rephidim is one of those details we skip over when we read our Bible, don't we? Our reading starts by saying that Israel set out from Rephidim, which means, by the way, "resting place." I know you're probably thinking "Pastor, who cares?" Well, you should. Let me tell you what happened at Rephidim. The people of Israel got angry at Moses because there was no water for them there. They were afraid they were going to die of thirst, so they complained and accused Moses of leading them out to the desert from Egypt to die. They looked back at Egypt and remembered having plenty of water there, even though they were in captivity and slavery there.

Moses took this complaint to God. He told God that the people were so irritated they were going to stone him, so God fixed their mess. He told Moses to go in front of the people to a rock and to hit that rock with his staff. Picture that for a moment. The people are dying for water in the middle of a desert and Moses leads them to a **ROCK**, not a spring, not a well, but a rock, and he hits that rock with his staff. This makes no sense, but water came from the rock and the people drank. From a rock, God brought water, water that quenched their thirst in a desert.

While they were at Rephidim, the Amalekites attacked, so Moses went to the top of a hill and lifted up his hands, and the Israelites started to win. But, when Moses lowered his hands, they started to lose. This kept happening over and over again, so they found a rock for Moses to sit on. A rock. Then Aaron and Hur held up Moses' hands because Moses got tired and Israel defeated the Amalekites because God delivered them through

Moses' hands -- just as He provided water from a rock through the staff in Moses' hand.

The Bible is more than a little important when it says they left Rephidim. I know you've never been to Rephidim and drank water from a rock because God's prophet struck it with a staff. You've never won a battle because the prophet's hands were uplifted. But, I'm guessing that if you had been to Rephidim and seen those things, you might not be inclined to leave. I mean, incredible things happened there for those people, but Israel did leave because God called them somewhere else. For all the marvel and wonder of Rephidim, there was even more ahead.

I call that to your attention because in this perverse age in which we live, people are leaving the church today in an effort to "find" God. As crazy as this is, people are doing it because they want a God who does what they want Him to do for them – a magic genie God. They want a God they can have on their terms. The BIG question seems to be, "What has He done for me, lately?" We read all of these stories in the Old Testament and we wonder why doesn't God do that for me like He did for them?

This is because people have an "if-then" idea about God. You know, if you do good for God, then He'll do good for you. Our text seems to present God in this way. Moses tells Israel that if they obey, then God will call them His treasured possession. If Israel obeys, they will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

But, what happens when they don't obey? What happens when Israel disobeys or obeys some other god? If Israel disobeys God, then He no longer is their God and they're no longer His people. Pure and simple. And My Friends, here's the **irony** of all of this. God's people did not become God's people through obedience. Did you hear me on that? Let

me say it again: They did not become God's people because of their obedience. They became God's people through God's grace in Christ Jesus. We are God's treasured possession not because of our obedience but because of His Grace, His mercy, His love in Christ Jesus. It was the same then. It's the same now.

1 Peter 2 says it this way: *But you -- and he's talking about Christians -- are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for [God's] own possession (v. 9)*. Then, Peter adds, these words, *Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (v. 10)*. God makes us what we don't deserve to be. Let me say that again: God makes us what we don't deserve to be. He makes us His own people out of His love and out of His mercy.

To those Israelites, God said, "You will be My people if you obey." They failed. We fail, and for our failure, we deserve death and hell. But, the GOOD NEWS of the Gospel is that Jesus didn't fail. The Savior lived His life in perfect obedience to God and in fulfillment of the Law for us. Jesus is the treasured possession that God is talking about. He's the King and the Priest of God. His obedience secures God's blessing for all us.

Let's go back to Rephidim for a minute. Remember, every verse of the Bible points us to the cross. Remember, the water from the Rock? The Rock that provided Moses with rest? How does that point to the cross? Simply this, My Friends, St. Paul writes, *the rock was Christ (1 Co 10:4)*. The water flowed from the rock. Jesus says, "*Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever*" (Jn 4:14). The rock provided Moses with a place to rest. Jesus says, "*Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Mt 11:28).

Jesus can say that because He obedient in our place. He loved God perfectly, obeyed all of God's commandments as we should have. And He did it all in our place, and God was pleased with Him. He died the death of the disobedient -- not because He had done anything wrong but because we daily disobey and sin against God. Jesus died the death He didn't deserve to die. He died because the promise had been broken -- broken not by Him, but by us.

Jesus kept the promise for us so that we can be the people of God. All who trust in Jesus are God's people because of what Jesus has done for them. And all who trust in Jesus as their Savior are God's treasured possession. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, we belong to God forever and ever, and, in Him, we are blessed.

Maybe we can think of it this way. In the hymn, which by the way is basically Psalm 91 set to music, we sing, "And He will raise you up on eagle's wings" {LSB 727}. I ask you Lutherans that Lutheran question: What does this mean? Well, when the time comes for baby eagles to leave the nest, mother eagle goes out and finds hard stones, jagged pieces of broken stuff, razor-sharp thistles, anything she can put in the bottom of the nest to make it as **uncomfortable** as she possibility can. And those little baby eagles, get the message, "I have to get out of here". But, they've never flown before. So on the day that they leave the nest and try to soar, what happens? You go it -- they fall. But rather than allow her children to fall to the ground and get hurt, or possibly even die, what does mother eagle do? She flies under the little ones, catches them on her wings, and brings them to safety.

"He will raise you up on eagle's wings." Our God lifts up His people on eagles' wings and saves us, even though we do not deserve it. He is

the God of grace and mercy who loves those who sometimes are not all that loveable. That's why God said to those Israelites, "Look to Rephidim." God is saying to the, "Look back, remember, don't ever forget what I have done for you." He lifted them up like the mother eagle who lifts and carries her young on outstretched wings.

Today, what do we do? Well, we don't look back to Rephidim. Actually, we look to something even more certain, even more beautiful, even something more powerful. We look to the cross, where God acted to save us all. Look and see, rejoice and be glad that you are God's treasured possession because of what Jesus Christ has done for you. Give up the foolish notion that life is in your hands. Those hands eventually fail. They eventually falter. Those hands eventually lose their grip on life. God calls us to look back at the cross and see Jesus' open hands and outstretched arms of grace, calling you back to Himself.

Look to Christ, our Rock, and see what He has done, and trust, rejoice, and find comfort in the Rock of Ages.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.