

Overcoming Through Transforming Love

August 22, 2021

Overarching Theme: In 2021, FUMC will be SENT with the peace of Christ!

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

On Easter evening, the Risen Christ appears to his gathered disciples for the first time since Good Friday and speaks these words: "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21). Just as Jesus sent his disciples into a divided, conflicted 1st Century with his peace, so he sends us into a divided, conflicted 2021 with his peace.

Reflect on this Scripture: Exodus 15:22-25 ²² *Then Moses ordered Israel to set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. ²³ When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter. That is why it was called Marah. ²⁴ And the people complained against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" ²⁵ He cried out to the LORD; and the LORD showed him a piece of wood; he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the LORD made for them a statute and an ordinance and there he put them to the test.*

This Week: The Book of Exodus, Exodus 15.

The Book of Exodus, the second of the Old Testament, is the story of God's rescue of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (Ex 1-15), Israel's travels in the wilderness (Ex 16-18) and God's making and restoring a covenant relationship with the Israelites at Mt. Sinai as they begin their journey toward the promise land (Exodus 19 -40).

Exodus 15 brings to a climax the story of God's miraculous deliverance of his people from cruel Egyptian bondage. The ensuing victory celebration is encapsulated in a brief poem commonly called "The song of Miriam." After this moment of celebration, the children of Israel soon experience adversity.

The first adversity concerns a water shortage, which is promptly transposed into a crisis of leadership (vv. 23-25a). The name of the place is Marah ("bitter"). It is commonly thought by scholars that the tale is told to explain how the oasis got its name, "bitter". What may have been such a name-tale is, however, transposed by the tradition into a serious theological crisis. There is no water, exactly what one might expect in the wilderness where life is at risk. Without water, the people will soon die.

The people "complain" against Moses. They are restless and discontented with his leadership. The trust they have placed in him/the LORD (v. 14:31) is soon dissipated, perhaps with the general wonderment, "What have they done for us lately?" Moses, however, does not respond to the complaint. He promptly turns the water crisis over to Yahweh.

We have already seen the rhetorical construct of "complaint-assurance" in 14:11-14, wherein Israel's complaint receives from Moses a salvation oracle that overcomes the cause of complaint. This narrative is structured in the same way, except that Yahweh's response is not a speech, but an act: Yahweh provides a means (a piece of wood) whereby bitter water becomes sweet, and the people overcome through transforming love. Perhaps this story foreshadows the work of Christ, who took upon himself a piece of wood (the cross) as well as full brunt of bitter waters of this world, suffering with us and for us. Since that time, many have found hope in the midst of their sufferings through all that this "piece of wood" represents and have overcome through transforming love.

Adapted from New Interpreters Commentary, Vol 1, pp. 806-807

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. Three days after God delivers Israel through the Red Sea miracle, the people encounter adversity (bitter waters) and their joy turns to complaint. What are some of the bitter waters that people encounter today? How do you respond when you encounter "bitter waters" (adversity)?
2. When the people complain, Moses cries out to the Lord and is shown a 'piece of wood.' How would you have responded to this 'solution' if you were Moses?
3. We don't know why the piece of wood worked, only that it transformed the bitter waters according to Exodus 15. Moving to the New Testament, what is the impact of the suffering love of Jesus (his 'piece of wood' or the cross) upon those who suffer through bitter waters today? Is it possible to overcome through transforming love?

4. Theologian Jürgen Moltmann attested, "*the suffering God saved me in my sufferings.*" Do you know of someone who can relate to this statement? How about you?
5. Respond to this statement – "God doesn't cause our suffering, but is with us in our suffering." Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Take time each day to journal in the "*Morning by Morning*" gratitude resource.
3. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week (Exodus 15:25):
²⁵ He [Moses] cried out to the LORD; and the LORD showed him a piece of wood; he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the LORD made for them a statute and an ordinance and there he put them to the test.