

Sunday 11th October



Frustration!

Many of us, today, are feeling frustrated, and when we're like that it's a good idea to look back at the roots of frustration. Look back to the time you were a toddler, throwing a tantrum just like the illustration above – and just because time has laid a gentle blanket of forgetting over our earliest years, don't kid yourself. You too had tantrums. Why?

The toddler screams (and all the rest!) with frustration when prevented from doing what they want to do, whether that frustration comes from an adult saying, "No!" or from a physical inability to achieve what they want. It has to do with finding yourself helpless against an immovable object.

So, we can see why we're feeling frustrated today when there are so many things we are prevented from doing, things that would make us feel better about our lives, better able to face the worries laid upon us by the current crisis. We polite folk try not to throw a tantrum, instead we scream inside, but it's not a bad idea to find some safe outlet instead: I used to find that smashing a piece of china (an unwanted one) on the floor was very satisfying. Another possibility is to try a diversionary tactic – if we can't do that, we can do this. And it is worth finding something, because otherwise the frustration can burst out in words or actions we regret. Let's take a look at Moses, **Numbers 20: 1-13**, the account of water from the rock. We're more used to reading the account in Exodus (Exodus 17: 1-7) but the account as told in Numbers adds an interesting insight.

The scenario is the same: in the Sinai the people are thirsty and start yet again to moan and long to return to Egypt, remembering it only as a golden time when everything was good (it wasn't!). God, given the problem, tells Moses to take his staff and, the company gathered around him, to command the rock to give up water. The people are assembled, but by now Moses is so frustrated with their moaning and complaining that he temporarily loses his cool. "Listen, you rebels. Must we get water for you out of this rock?" Then he doesn't merely speak to the rock as he was told to do, he hits it with the staff and water flows out. Do you see where his frustration has led him? Into a dramatization that suggests *his* actions are bringing about the miracle and worse, "Must **we** get water for you out of this rock." We, not God. God was not impressed that Moses had not upheld his holiness – I guess essentially putting himself on an equal footing with God - and as a result, Moses learns that he will not lead the people into the promised land.

Frustration, not dealt with, can lead any of us to actions and comments that we profoundly regret and that can affect our future. Yes, today there are many things we can't do, many things that are distressing us, so there's a need to seek God's guidance through his Spirit as to what we *can* do, firstly what will build us up and then how we can respond realistically and calmly to the current situation and how we can share the love of God with the people around us.

Remember, God responded immediately to bring water to the thirsty, it was Moses who turned it into something of a circus. God is still happy to bring quietly what we need, and particularly at this time to bring what we need psychologically and spiritually to cope here and now. And bear in mind – what we remember from before this lockdown time wasn't all good, it had its problems and annoyances too!



The rock in the Sinai from which water is reputed to have come – in the Koran, it states that Moses struck the rock twelve times, for each of the Tribes of Israel. The rock has twelve slits from which something at some time has flowed. You choose what you think! The other picture is from a mural at St Catherine's Monastery, Sinai.

A Prayer

We pause before God, perhaps tired, for being frustrated, angry is very tiring.

Loving God our Father, from whom streams of living water flow
to cleanse us of sin, of weariness, we pray that healing flow for the world today.
For many are hungry, thirsty; many live in streets littered in refuse, running with sewage;
many drown in a flood of fear, deafened by sounds of fighting;
many sit alone, lost, wondering how they can cope.
There are people close to us who are struggling against a tide of misfortune.
This grieves us and we know that this grieves you.
For these, and so many more, we pray your healing, your peace to fill and refresh.

We pray your healing stream of living water to pour within the corridors of power,
both in our own and other nations.
Bring, we pray, the stream of the Spirit's wisdom and peace where there are negotiations
and hard decisions to be made,

and bring the calm of that same Spirit where there is the pull of competing issues and needs.
Help all, we pray, to act from calm and not from frustration.

Calmly, Lord, we look out at the world and ask that you show us the good around us today.
What good thing can we do to take our minds off things or to improve things for someone else?
Show us, enable us, we ask. Help us know how to pray.
Loving God, in this frustrating time, bring healing, bring wisdom, bring peace we ask.

Thank you that, as we look about us, we see the colours of autumn,
the richness of berries, nuts, seeds; the rain sparking on the leaves.
Thank you, loving Lord, for the wonder and beauty of the earth, and for our own place within it,
for the trust you place in us to tend the earth and its inhabitants, great and small,
both those who fill us with joy and those who irritate us.
We rejoice that all are within your love, for it was for all that Jesus laid down his life.

Our prayers we offer in the name of Jesus your Son our Saviour,
who offers to all true life in all its fullness. Amen

Blessings, Ruth