

# Sermon Starter – God Sustains

*Exodus 17:1-7, John 4:5-42*

The encounters with God in the Exodus and John passages revolve around water, which provides the opportunity for meeting and learning more about God. Water is a powerful metaphor in Scripture and many in our congregations will likely have memories of encounters with God that are connected to water. As part of your sermon preparation, write down all the ways water appears in the Bible and the significance of each. What do you discover? Which do you most identify with? Are there additional ways water has been connected to encounters with God for you or your congregation? What have you witnessed? If you are planning on using both Scriptures for this Sunday, notice that water provides the backdrop and proof of God's presence in each one. In Exodus, water becomes the answer to the question, "Is the Lord among us or not?" Having basic physical needs met confirms God's presence. In John, the living water Jesus offers and that the woman requests ("Sir, give me this water") answers the question, "Are you greater than our father Jacob?" Here, we see that spiritual growth and greater understanding in our lives are a testimony to God at work in and with us. Together, these stories suggest that both the provision of daily physical needs and the provision of spiritual awakening are evidence of God's loving presence.

## Additional ideas

1. The Exodus 17 story becomes critical memory in Israel and the early church. It is remembered in Psalm 95 (the lectionary Psalm for the day) and it is alluded to three times in two chapters in Hebrews 3 and 4. Complaining to God is not the caution. The Psalms are full of complaints to God, and Israel's salvation event of exodus was birthed in the womb of complaint (God heard their cries of suffering/complaining). Complaining in those cases is a form of trust, believing God hears and cares.
2. Another approach to John 4 grows out of the woman's request, "Sir, give me this water." God has acted first and made this living water available for all and for free. But it requires action on our part, admitting our thirst/need, and then asking. We can have a glass of water sitting beside us all day and die of thirst. We can stand in the rain or go swimming and not get our thirst quenched. The only way to quench our thirst is to admit we are thirsty and take a drink. This water Jesus offers never runs dry, even in the most arid times of our lives! But we must regularly drink. If you use this approach,

you might want to conclude the time with offering cups of water to people. They could be already poured, or you could pour water into a cup. If you choose the latter, pour water in until it overflows and watch first the shock, then the smiles begin to develop as the reality settles into them.

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