

## **Sustenance ~ March 27, 2011**

**Exodus 17:1-7; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-15; Psalm 95**

The other day Cathy Andersen sent me a website called the “Eagle Cam,” that I forwarded on to a few of you. It is a camera located in nest of bald eagles in Norfolk Botanical Garden in Virginia. There is an ongoing blog monitored by moderators that answers viewers’ questions. The eagle pair has three offspring that are fed several times each day. They are growing very quickly—right before our very eyes. They depend on the sustenance their parents provide for them—mostly fish but occasionally a small animal or two. The water they require comes from the fish.

Water is essential for all living beings, eagles as well as humans. We find it playing a role in two of our readings for this morning. The Israelites, grumbling their way through the desert, wanted, at the very least, some water. So, according to our story, Moses struck a rock with his staff and water appeared by the grace of God. This quieted the folks complaining about Moses, for a while.

Jesus told the Samaritan woman that he was the “living water,” that once she had drunk of all he had and was, she would never be thirsty again. She would find the necessary sustenance to carry her through life with all of its ups and downs. It might have taken her a few minutes to process all that he told her. But, she finally understood that he was the one who would help her find spiritual wholeness which would give her the strength to move through life with a certainty she had not had before. She told others what she had seen and heard and they, upon spending time with Jesus, came to believe that he was the one they had been waiting for—the savior. And, so, the base of the fledgling faith grew.

We all find sustenance for our lives from different sources. As children we are nurtured and nourished by our parents or by other caring adults who take a look at us and determine what it is that will carry us through the early, dependent years of life. As we grow, we may be blessed enough to find teachers, and aunts and uncles who help us move along and develop into worthwhile humans. The gifts we receive from a growing circle of people help enrich our lives and our understanding of the world.

Even Paul reminds us, when things are not going well, we have a base in faith that sustains us. Even when things are difficult, even when we might be suffering and struggling, we can turn to the center of our being and discover the love and support of God which dwells there. We can learn from the painful “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” and determine that we will go on, we will move forward, we will not allow an obstacle to keep us from becoming the best humans we can become. We have that spring of “living water” within us in the form of the teachings of Jesus that helps us grow from suffering into endurance.

When we are hanging on for dear life and when we think we can endure no longer, we often discover something new about ourselves. We find, that we emerge from our various pressure cookers, new people with new images of ourselves and our strength. We discover we have developed a new depth or a new facet to our characters. Perhaps, we have learned through suffering and endurance to have more patience with others and ourselves. Perhaps, we might have discovered that others have viewpoints that are worthy to consider along with the way we think is the only right way. Perhaps, we learn that there are just some puzzles and problems we

can't solve and that we need to set them aside until another day when we can see things from a different and wiser perspective. It's always amazing what a good night's sleep can do in helping us find our way to new solutions for old problems.

With this change in our character comes hope—renewed hope that causes us to believe that there is a brighter future for us and for those we love. Hope emerges that we will be able to unknot those problems that have plagued us and that a new day will dawn full of promise. Somehow hope always seems to be within us. Hope when things seem most hopeless. Hope that digs in its heels, and points us into a new direction. Sometimes, it does, indeed, come from the love of God that has been poured into our hearts. Sometimes it comes from the touch of another person, from a steadying word that slows us down and helps us reconsider our pathway, sometimes in a gift of extreme generosity that saves us at the last possible moment. When life threatens to defeat us, hope feeds us and sustains us and carries us onward. When a roadblock appears there is always a way around it, or over it or through it. Always. I have learned this from friends who have endured much and who just keep on going. I learned this from my mother who always said, “Life is grand if you don't weaken.”

That's just what Paul was saying in his thoughtful Letter to the Romans. There is much to be gained from a life lived in faith with courage and strength and the determination that whatever it is we will face there is sustenance for us in the living water of our faith. It seems that we find it present for us when we need it the most. There is always hope.

*-- Amen*