

Proper 21 (A) – September 25, 2011  
Saint Stephen’s Church, Wimberley, TX  
Patrick Gahan  
Exodus 17:1-7  
*Quit Whining!*

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They were not whining – but scheming. Get this, Kay and I were invited to a very nice dinner party at a very nice home amongst very nice people, and quite unexpectedly these polite people started talking about their morning showers of all things.... It’s not what you think. [*The preacher picks up a galvanized bucket and holds it throughout the sermon.*] No, instead of whining and going on and on about our water crisis, this bunch has been placing a bucket in the shower with them to collect every extra drop of water, so they can to refresh their plants and such. Perhaps it seems ‘*like a drop in the bucket*’, but I ask you to consider how that simple exercise changes their state of mind first thing in the morning? Take nothing for granted, quit your whining and incessant complaining, and promise to *pour* everything into the new day!

Thinking about my friends toting those buckets into their shower stalls, reminded me of a new term I learned a week or so ago: *Dayclean*. Theodore Wardlaw of Austin Presbyterian Seminary explains that *dayclean* is a Gullah word still used in the Lowcountry of South Carolina by those of West African descent. *Dayclean* essentially means the early morning, and so you can just hear the strong voice of a Black mother *spouting off* to her charges, “Child, you get on to bed because *dayclean* is coming!”<sup>1</sup> I like the word because it insists that each day is a new thing, a clean slate whose personal story about us has yet to be written. Neither the regrets of the past or the pressures of the future can dull the hope of *dayclean*; it *galvanizes* the promise of a new day. This outlook leaves no room for whining.

In the Exodus story read today, God is essentially asking the Israelites to quit whining and believe in that promise of a new day. True, God has led Israel into the harshest piece of real estate in the world – the Sinai Desert. To call it a “wilderness” is just being nice. The Sinai is a barren, green-less, hot-as-hell, life-draining, waterless expanse extending about 132 miles between Egypt and Israel. No wonder the Israelites are whining. They do not think they will exit the desert alive. They *erupt* at Moses, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” **(EX 17:3)**

Yet the Lord has yet to fail Israel. Terrified, the Israelites beg for deliverance from Pharaoh’s advancing army, and God stops the Egyptians in their tracks **(EX 14:5-31)**. Parched, they needed water once before, and God provided it **(EX 15:22-27)**. Famished, the Israelites cried out for food, and God sent a generous daily ration of quails and manna **(EX 16:1-26)**. Every time they whine, God delivers.

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<sup>1</sup> Theodore Wardlaw, “Reflections on the Lectionary”, *Christian Century*, September 6, 2011, 19.

Nevertheless, the long way forward seems impossible and the entrance into that Promised Land seems highly improbable. Leaving Egypt behind is hard. We know this because breaking out of our own slavery is hard. As destructive as our old habits are, we so eagerly and easily return to them. But God does not ask the Israelites or us to take the long view – but the short one. He asks them to stop their whining. Just trust him for the day, renew their faith every morning, believe that each sunrise gives them a clean slate, and God is liable to do most anything with them come morning. Each one of us is a clean canvas for God each morning. It's *dayclean*, after all!

Hearing that old Gullah word, I think of something older still. In the sixth century, Saint Benedict would lead his monks in the early morning recitation of Psalm 95, the *Venite*, "Oh, that today you would hearken to God's voice!" (**PS 95:7**) This is the same psalm that we Episcopalians sing to greet the new day in Morning Prayer (BCP, 82).

Don't be deceived. Armed with our Morning Prayers, we Christians don't naively stumble into the new day imagining everything is going to be hunky-dory anymore than our friends conclude that dragging a bucket into their morning shower is going to solve our water crisis. The key is how we greet the morning. We believe that God is able and liable to do most anything with us with each sunrise. That's why God asks us not to take the long view, but the short one.

I was reprimanded on this account last Saturday morning. I popped into Deer Creek to visit with John and Dollie East. I was so pleased to see that she was sitting up, dressed, bright-eyed, and ready for the daily grind of physical therapy. Of course, John, her husband, was sitting quietly beside her – as he has done longer than most of us have been alive. I then asked the wrong question, "So, Dollie, how much longer will you be here?" She looked at her young preacher and said, "I don't know. I am just going to wake up and give it my best every day so I can go home with John."

Dollie is not taking the long view – but the short one. She has been married to that man sitting next to her for over 70 years. But they did not get that far by looking way out ahead of them but by giving themselves fully to the new day. Dollie and John have greeted over 26,000 new days together!

Thinking about those two, I cannot help but think of Lazarus, whom Jesus brought back from the dead (**JN 11:1-44**). Through the years, heaps of poems and stories have been written about Lazarus, who had been dead four days when Christ raised him back to life. Our fascination is not with Jesus' miracle but with Lazarus who must get up the next day knowing full well that he will die again.

You see Lazarus is each one of us. We were dead, but Christ raised us to a new life. We are *showered* with new life. But to experience the resurrected life, to really know it, we have to begin each day with a clean slate, *dayclean*, and quit our infernal whining...for anything else '*pails*' in comparison! [*As the preacher swings the bucket in his hand.*]