

OUTSIDE THE PYRAMID
[written in oral form]

Exodus 17:1-7
Proper 21, Year A Matins

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The Hebrews fled the land of the pyramids, but did they really?

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We know from Exodus, that they were in a threatening and dangerous situation.

We are told that we are living in precarious times.

To be sure, there are no sabre-toothed tigers lurking about, and we don't have to hide from marauding drunken bandits, but.... our world today is thin on stable, peace loving leaders. There's Global warming rendering larger storms; someplace, somewhere there are terrorists about to pounce,.....and football gladiators are ruining our entertainment by taking a knee in protest.

Our world can feel unstable and unsafe.

Even so, we must be careful not to surrender to reassuring words from a strong leader who claims, "I'll take care of things.... Everything will be okay..... Trust me!"

We tend to believe what we want to hear, as long as it makes us feel better..... because we worry about our base needs and we want to feel safe..... whether we are or not.

All too typical, a person's world view is as far as he/she can see, ..... and that vision tends to only see the walls of one's personal fortress.

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According to the humanist, psychologist Abraham Maslow, what motivates us can be summed up in a pyramid structure called the *Hierarchy of Needs*. I'm sure you are aware of his theory.

Maslow presented a logical theory that appears to explain life in a nut shell..... or more specifically, a pyramid.

He asserted that we have to meet our physiological needs first.

We will do little else until they are met.

The bottom level is physical needs.

Maslow said that unless each level's needs are met, we can not proceed to the next level of development. In many respects, Maslow was accurate. We can not endure very long without food and shelter, yet his model infers that we humans are trapped inside the pyramid. In other words, it is all up to us and our own self interests.

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Safety, security, order and stability is the next level, just above the base physical needs. Obviously absent is that Maslow doesn't allow room for transcendence / for God's part.

Belongingness and love is after that, followed by Esteem (which includes self-respect and feelings of success), and at the top of the pyramid is self-actualization.

Maslow claimed that self actualization is the ultimate goal, **but it isn't**. Our relationship with God is the most important part of life, and our spiritual connection with God greatly alters our view of the world and of life. Self is no longer the first priority, ....and **that view** doesn't fit in Maslow's model. It is **beyond** / outside of his theory.

For example, the story of Jesus in the wilderness reveals that Spiritual vibrancy is not dependent on other needs being met. Jesus over came the restrictions of meeting the base needs. ~~~~~  
Our Greatest need is felt deep with in us, and is fulfilled only by being in a whole and healthy relationship with God, creation and others. AND, that is beyond the realm of the needs that Maslow addresses.

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However, Maslow's observations of humanity are fairly accurate. There is a lot of validity in his theory. We humans like the pieces to fit together. We seek predictability We want our base needs met. We want order in our life. We don't like surprises, and we especially disdain living in mystery / in the unknown.....and that includesliving in faith.

Therefore, we are very content if "order" is NOT challenged, things don't change and life is simple, predictable and under "our" control.

Left to our own concerns, ,most of us desire to have our lives become a living pyramid - a safe and secure place. And, we find comfort when we are told, "all is well,..... yes means yes, and no means no."

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In a way, we form our own pyramid.

A pyramid is an amazing structure. Geometry and physics were not my forte, but even I can see that a Pyramid is an extremely sturdy design, formed by the strength of triangles. [ ]. It is obvious why the Egyptians chose this design to built their mighty structures..... because **they are** strong/ durable. **They also represent** strength and durability.

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From the Exodus passage, we are told about the Hebrews escaping from slavery; they had left the land of the Pyramids,.....and were wandering in the desert..... and they were very thirsty.

Upon superficial reading we might conclude that Maslow was right; that they could do nothing else, until that base need was met.

Yet.....meeting a base need is not the point.
Their faith in God was weak.

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Many of the Hebrews were having second thoughts about their Exodus away from captivity in Egypt, away from regular meals, away from the stability and safety they once had, AWAY from the land of pyramids.

*I wouldn't be surprised that quite a few of them deserted and headed back to Egypt / back to slavery. It sure would have been easier in some ways. Nostalgia can blur one's memory and vision of the bigger picture.*

We humans tend to deceive ourselves and settle for less, as long as our base needs are met. – Maybe Maslow was right.

For example, the majority of Russians did not care for the turmoil and uncertainty after the collapse of the Soviet Union. They chose to limit freedom in the pursuit of predictability, and there is Putin.

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When we are stressed, our “reptilian” brain,.. that demands self be served, ...accepts lies as truths,.... and leads us backwards.

So, I do imagine that some of the Hebrews, headed back to Egypt.

The Bible doesn't mention them. This story is about those who stuck it out.... EVEN Though they doubted and complained.

They complained so much that Moses feared for his life and had to get away from them for a while.

I appreciate Moses' question in verse 4, "What shall I do with this people?" In the church domain, we can get so absorbed with the little things and the mystery ...that we ignore what is really important, which is faith in God--in love and grace.

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With guidance from God, Moses returned.

And, yes their base needs were met, but don't over look the fact that Moses named the place where they received water, “quarrel and test”. **This embarrassing scenario is noted in the Bible.**

It's a human tendency to not record or state shameful, embarrassing things. Yet, confession is good. Confession invites compassion and healing, and confession is necessary for our spiritual growth.

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I was pleased to read MC Canada's deathbed confession that was circulated this week.

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It is critical to know that...Honest, humble confession nourishes our faith in God.

Confession is breaking out from the pyramid influence.

Confession invites the mystery.....and invites God in.

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The Exodus text ends with the profound question:

Is the Lord among us or not?

I do fear that we have become very astute at building our own pyramids. We seek to control each day, and tomorrow. We build a retirement plan so we don't have to worry,... so we don't have to...

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Looking back, I think my faith in God was stronger when I didn't know if I would have a meal the next day...../ when I didn't know how I could pay my rent.

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I think comfort and affluence can turn our faith into mostly self trust.

It doesn't have to, but.....Is the Lord among us or not?

Do our daily choices reflect our acclaimed faith in God?

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This is a strange thing:

We work hard, all our lives... to replace God / to diminish the very thing that we claim we cherish.

What is our faith all about?