

Our complaint and God's provision (Exodus 17:1-7; 26A)

The “promised land” is whatever is on the other side of this coronavirus.

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I'm writing this just before school starts, as districts across the country are publicizing their plans for fall. Whether online, in person, or a hybrid of the two, the options for students, parents, and caregivers are complex.

While there has been much spirited debate in the public square about the choices, one fact that most have been able to agree on is this: education in the time of COVID-19 is a no-win situation for all involved. Modified pedagogical modalities created under the duress of a pandemic are at best just stop-gap measures for an unknown new normal on the other side of a summer of case surge, resistance to social distancing guidelines, and incompetent government leadership.

Like the Israelites, parents and children have been on a rocky journey over the last several months, wading through the muck of biological threats, shutdowns, and unprecedented strains on the mental and emotional wellbeing of entire family systems. The “promised land” is whatever is on the other side of this coronavirus—hopefully a vaccine, better medical treatments, and the ability to breathe freely and gather openly without fear of infection. The pathway to the other side won't be an easy one, and getting through it successfully will require sacrifice, patience, flexibility, and trust—trust in human leadership and, for people of faith, in God.

Even before schools released their plans, there was no shortage of complaints and grumbling about them. One need only log in to social media or tune in to the latest Zoom meeting to hear the litany. Perhaps it is because the superintendents and school board presidents, like Moses, have not yet proven themselves. Or perhaps it is because the people have asked for solutions yet have still been unsatisfied—because they didn't come fast enough or look like they wanted them to look.

Provision in Exodus (freedom, manna, water) doesn't come without some challenge in the process and likely some no-win or less-than-ideal solutions. But provision is made ultimately by God, with the people being guided by Moses. Provision in this time of COVID-19 won't come without challenge either, and, as the plans have already shown, it won't come without some no-win or less-than-ideal solutions.

But provision has come and will continue to come—ultimately from God. With or without grumbling or complaining, the Spirit will still be at work. There is hope on the other side of the complaints.