

“Quarreling”

Exodus 17:1-7

Holiday Island Presbyterian Church

October 1, 2017

INTRODUCTION:

Today, through the writing of Moses,

we get to take a look at who God is

and how God responds to and provides for people

in a time of incredible anxiety and danger.

At least once in the life of every believer,

there comes a moment or a time when we ask:

"Is God with us or not?" (17:7)

**That's what we ask when the world has broken down our doors,
charged through our defenses**

and is threatening our peace and security.

In these moments of high anxiety and extreme fear

we want to be reassured that God is with us

and not at some administrative meeting in heaven.

**Imagine, if you will, the Israelite woman
with young children whose lips are parched
and who cry dry tears for lack of water.**

Can you imagine her anxiety and fear?

You know she has to be wondering does God really care.

CONTEXT

This is not the first time the people are facing a lack of water.

The first time is found in Exodus 15:22.

The people have been in the wilderness for three days.

And are at a place called Marah.

What little water they find there is bitter and undrinkable.

After the people complained,

**Moses called out to God and God provided a piece of wood,
to be thrown into the water to make it sweet and potable.**

Again, in Exodus 16,

the people are struggling to listen to and believe in God

Who has instructed them not to gather manna

and store it up.

And Moses has the thankless job

of bringing people into obedience to God's instructions.

Then, when we turn to the scripture for today, Exodus 17.

The Israelites are once again facing problems

that can only be solved by God's intervention.

They have camped at a place called Rephidim,

but there is no water to drink.

The complaining reaches such a point there is even quarreling.

The people take their demand to Moses and say to him,

"Give us water to drink" (17:2).

First of all, you have to get past the idea

that people of God might quarrel with each other

or make demands of their leader.

Surely that is a rare thing in a Christian church.

Presbyterians don't do that, do they?

**I find it amusing that these people turn on the very one
who led their release from bondage
and are now demanding that Moses give them water.**

Moses' response is to accuse the people of testing Yahweh:

"Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test Yahweh?" (17:2).

NEW RELATIONSHIPS:

There are some interesting pieces of scripture in the Old Testament that refer to God "testing" the people and people testing God.

Here's what God said to Moses before releasing the people from Egypt. In Exodus 6:6-8 we read:

**6"Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. 7
'Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. 8I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham,**

Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession; I am the LORD.'"...

So, on one hand,

we have a people who have been chosen and delivered by God, trying to adjust to believing in and serving this God.

On the other hand, we have God

who is testing the faith of the very people

God has chosen and delivered.

It is a spiritual dance that continues even today.

God allows us to be tested and we complain and wonder if God really cares or not

Moses interprets this situation to be another of God's tests.

And the quarreling and requests for water

are the people's response to that test.

There is considerable doubt in the minds of the people

as to the leadership capabilities of Moses.

They have overlooked or forgotten that it was NOT Moses

who led them out of Egypt.

It was God.

**And they are not at all sure or comfortable
with being told they are “chosen” by God.**

Didn't Pharaoh “choose” them to be slaves in Egypt?

There is a wonderful monologue in *Fiddler on the Roof*.

Tevye says to God:

Sometimes I wonder, when it gets too quiet up there, if You are thinking, "What kind of mischief can I play on My friend Tevye? It may sound like I'm complaining, but I'm not. After all, with Your help, I'm starving to death. Oh, dear Lord. You made many, many poor people. I realize, of course, it's no shame to be poor... but it's no great honor either. So what would be so terrible... if I had a small fortune? As the Good Book says, if you spit in the air, it lands in your face. I know, I know. We are Your chosen people. But, once in a while, can't You choose someone else?"

There is so much truth in that statement!

**It captures the feelings of these people
who are in desperate need of water.**

Based on their questions,

they seem to assume that God has left Moses in charge

**and that Moses' agenda is similar to that of the Pharaoh -
- to use the people for labor**

**and as a means to gain glory over an upstart god
who dares challenge Pharaoh's authority.**

**So Moses goes back to God again,
complaining about the people:**

"What shall I do with this people?!"

**God tells Moses to take the staff he was given
and to meet God on the rock at Horeb,
from which water will flow when Moses strikes it with his
staff.**

There is a wonderful metaphor here.

**God chooses to bring water -- and the life it symbolizes—
out of something that appears to be lifeless; a rock.**

**This may be symbolic of God's intentions to bring the people life,
not death, as they suspect.**

Out of Egypt and out of the wilderness,

God will find ways to make life flow in unexpected ways.

**But it will require a certain amount of trust from the people,
a willingness to put faith in a god**

who does not do things in expected ways.

This display of divine power is far less dramatic

**than controlling the waters of the Red Sea
and turning them into dry land.**

**You would think that would be confirmation enough
that God is with the people and cares deeply for them.**

I can't help but ask:

Is this confirmation enough for us?

Can we trust this God to be with us during our trials?

One of the thoughts I draw from this scripture

Is that God will not abandon us if – when – we grumble

About the way God is treating us.

We aren't expected to be happy in our trials.

But, we are also expected to KEEP our faith

Because God has promised to be with us

And God always is faithful to keep His promises.

One of the ways we can reassure ourselves

That God is indeed with us

Is to celebrate the Lord's Supper together.

It is a strong symbol and a strong reminder

Of how deeply God cares for us

And it reassures us that God is still with us.

PRAYER:

**When we grumble, O Lord, and when we doubt, lessen our trials
and increase our faith. Most of all, remind us that we are not alone.**

That You are always with us.