

EXODUS 17:1-7

WHY SEND ME HERE?!

“All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the Lord, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink” (v. 1). That opening verse is striking. God commanded the people of Israel to go to a place that had no water to drink. They didn’t just stumble into this dry land out of their own ignorance, but rather God sent them there. Then they asked this question of Moses, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt” to this place of death? (v.3)

Why, why, why Lord? Why me? Why this? Why now? No exact answer is given other than that the people are learning to trust in God, as we too go through hardships and struggles to learn to trust in God.

These were difficult students to teach. They had lived through the Ten Plagues, including being redeemed by the blood of the Passover Lamb. They faced the Red Sea with the Egyptians charging up behind them and God dividing the sea before them, and then closing it up on the Egyptians behind them. Yet, after all that, Israel continues to respond with doubt and grumbling. To put our text into perspective, on top of their rescue from Egypt think on these two incidents in the two chapters right before our text.

“When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah. And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" And he cried to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet” – Exodus 15:(23-25).

In the next chapter, we hear the Lord say, “I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.'" In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat” (Exodus 16:12-15).

Now in our chapter the Lord brings them to another place without water. Wouldn’t it be reasonable for the people to ask Moses to ask the Lord for water in another miraculous way? They had seen God do it before. Why didn’t they trust in God as the Lord their God now? Because faith can quickly fade away when hardships strike us. They can be big or little problems, but we quickly turn to grumbling about the people in the church, or those not attending the church, the people in our community, the people who run our township, or our

country. And finally, we grumble about God. Maybe we even walking away from God.

Wherever God has sent and placed you in life He's trying to teach you something, and it may be as it was for the Israelites here, He may be trying to teach you to trust in Him, that He will provide for you, and take care of you. What are the earthly gifts that He has given you so far. He has given all of us life. Some of you have a spouse, children, and maybe even grandchildren. You have a house to live in, maybe even a home. You've had a job and are enjoying retirement, or looking forward to retirement.

You have heavenly gifts from God too. He forgives your sins through the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus. He applies that forgiveness to you through your baptisms and Holy Absolution in the service, and the Lord's Supper. You have the Word of God to hear in a church and read at home. You have a pastor and Christian friends. You have the Holy Spirit given to you in your baptisms and the promise of eternal life in heaven.

What hasn't God provided you with? Think of those times when you were frightened, worried, or grumbling about life. Are you still dealing with them? Is God helping you through them, or are they in the past because God has helped you? Has He supported you in your time of sickness, grief, or loss? When do you stop complaining about what you don't have, and start thanking God for what you do have?

Don't get me wrong there's nothing wrong with complaining to God in prayer. In the Bible they're called prayers of lament. Yet the difference between grumbling to God and lamenting to God is your attitude. The heart with which you talk to God, is it trusting God even as you lament to God? Do you even pray to God, or do you just take your frustrations to other people, complaining to them about other people, or even God.

Try to think about what are the big things in your life that make it difficult for you to trust in God. Maybe it's not water, unless you're struggling to pay your water bills, or the pipes are broken in your house and you can't afford to get them fixed. It could be anything that you can't afford because you're not paid enough or your retirement income is too low. What strikes a nerve for you: car payments, family fights, declining health? Are there things that you're struggling with so deep down that you dare not utter them to others, and you wonder if you can even tell God? Is it relationship needs, physical or mental health? Do you see God providing for others while you go unnoticed and feel rejected? Do you covet the life that someone else is living?

What can lead you out of this downward spiral of grumbling complaints about life? What can help is looking at God providing in ways that we don't expect. Did you expect to see bitter water turned sweet by throwing a log in it,

or water to come from a rock that was struck by a staff. We have our ideas about how our problems can be fixed. God may have completely different ideas, ideas that seem weird or odd to us.

When the people saw Moses and the elders walk away did they think that Moses was leaving them to die in the wilderness? Did they think he was going to dig a well, or pray for rain? What would you think Moses was doing as he walked away? Then God stood upon a rock, likely in a pillar of cloud like they had been following out of Egypt. Slow your thoughts down now. Is God showing up to lead them to water, or to strike down the complaining Israelites? Moses strikes the rock. Is Moses angry with God and now he's taking his anger out on the rock? And if Moses turns against God does that mean we're all doomed to die in the wilderness? Are any of you thinking at this moment that water is going to come out of that rock, or are you thinking God is going to strike Moses dead, and maybe give us a new leader?

Think about your life. God has made promises to you to be with you and take care of you. What do you think of when you're struggling? Maybe you feel like you're hitting your head against a wall and crying for "water", but help doesn't come. What do you think while you wait for help, or have you given up waiting?

Jesus promised that He would come back soon. He would take away all sin, all pain, all death, and all grumbling and sorrow. Jesus hasn't come back yet. Instead, He has brought you here. Here you wait in that wilderness period of your life. Are you grumbling? Or are you trusting in God?

Through God's Holy Word we're called again and again, we're invited and empowered to trust in God's promises. He raised Jesus from the dead! Do you think your problems are too great for God to handle. You might not get a miraculous solution to your problems but you can know that God hears your cries of lament. He cares about your prayers personally and deeply. It's not like God is going to tell you that He has more important things to do. Sure, He would like to see us stop crying about our problems and trust in Him. The people needed water or they'd die. You might be able to live with your problems, and live trusting that God is caring for you, taking you through them and upholding you.

As Christians we look past our daily problems to Jesus returning and taking us to the Promised Land of heaven. That's what the Israelites were meant to focus on, that God was leading them to a Promised Land in which they would find rest. God is leading you to a New Heavens and a new earth where there will be nothing to grumble about. Until then let God transform your grumbling inclinations towards a life of prayer, gratitude, joy and anticipation for the return of the Lord. Amen.