

Sunday 27th September Trinity 16

Exodus 17:1-7

The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, travelling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ²So they quarrelled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink."

Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?"

³But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?"

⁴Then Moses cried out to the LORD, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me."

⁵The LORD answered Moses, "Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷And he called the place Massah^[a] and Meribah^[b] because the Israelites quarrelled and because they tested the LORD saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Philippians 2:1-13

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ²then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

⁵In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶Who, being in very nature^[a] God,

did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷rather, he made himself nothing

by taking the very nature^[b] of a servant,

being made in human likeness.

⁸And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself

by becoming obedient to death—

even death on a cross!

⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place

and gave him the name that is above every name,

¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.

¹²Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.

Matthew 21:23-32

Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?"

²⁴Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ²⁵John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?"

They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?'" ²⁶But if we say, 'Of human origin'—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet." ²⁷So they answered Jesus, "We don't know."

Then he said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

²⁸What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' ²⁹'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. ³⁰Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. ³¹Which of the two did what his father wanted?"

"The first," they answered.

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³² For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

Collect

Lord of creation, whose glory is around and within us:
open our eyes to your wonders, that we may serve you with reverence
and know your peace at our lives' end, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Reflections

The book of Exodus is a book of journeying. It tells the story of the journey of the Israelites from slavery to freedom to the 'promised land' – accompanied by God. Within its pages are many stories, vignettes of passion, idolatry, mutiny, theft, murder and ultimately deliverance. It makes a pretty good cover-to-cover read. The vignette we see in Exodus 17 is one of mutiny.

The Israelites have been wandering about in the desert for some time 'travelling from place to place as the Lord commanded'. They make camp at Rephidim, but discover a fundamental problem with the campsite – there is no water for them to drink. After weeks of endless, seemingly pointless wanderings, this is the last straw. The people begin to rebel. Just what was God thinking of to bring them to this arid place? Moses had clearly got it wrong.

The mutinous Israelites challenge the leadership of Moses. 'Why did you bring us here to die of thirst?'

Wrong question! In chapter 16, we learn of God's miraculous provision of bread in the form of manna and quail when they were hungry. Have they learned nothing? The question should not have been and angry 'why?' but an awed, perhaps bemused, 'how will God provide for us this time?'

Projecting their anger and frustration, Moses has a bit of a barney with God. After all, he had never wanted this job in the first place and things were starting to unravel. Patiently God gives him instructions, assuring Moses that He would be there at the rock. Moses obeys, and the people get their water. The challenge to Moses' leadership is allayed.

The past 6 months have seen us on a seemingly endless wandering through Covid19. In a sense, we have endured a form of slavery through full lockdown, but now we may ask 'where are we heading?' Like the Israelites, we look to our leaders to provide the answer. We are perhaps better placed with the 'why?' so we may well focus on the 'how?'

'How are we going to get out of this mess?' we may well ask. In their wanderings, the Israelites prayed when they were hungry and the miracle of the quail sandwiches occurred. They needed water and it was miraculously provided. When we pray, do we expect miracles or do we expect to be the answer to our own prayers? Modern technology and advances in science mean that what would have seemed like miracles in the ancient world are common place. Answered prayer can come in many forms; for us, perhaps the miracle is in the timing. The important thing is that we pray and stay close to God.

Throughout the Israelites' wanderings, God was always there, even if the people could not see it. He is surely here with us now as we navigate the path set before us – even if we can't see Him.

May you be blessed with knowing God's presence in your lives.