

## **Pentecost 17 Year A**

### **Exodus 17:1-7**

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?"

So Moses cried out to the Lord, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." The Lord said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people... take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile .... I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink."

Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

## Sermon

These are hard days.

People we love get sick from this or that.  
And then, we lose some.

Politicians rant and rave.

I can't remember when politicians  
tried to scare me into voting for them.

I try not to join in. These days remind me of the Y2K scare.  
I still have left over food and ammo.

I dream about a long vacation.

Somewhere there's no Virus.  
All the flights to Mars and Venus are booked!

I think that's how the Israelites felt.

Let's not be too hard on them.

The Old Testament makes them look like faithless whiners.

But they were just regular folks. Like us.

Following Moses across a dry wilderness.

They'd been through an awful lot.  
They were just plain worn out.

*Let's not be too hard on the Israelites.*

They still remembered the 7 plagues.

They still remembered the Passover.

When Yahweh's Angel slaughtered those Egyptian baby boys.  
They still remembered the Egyptians chasing them, with chariots,  
As Israel approached the Red Sea, on foot.

They still remembered Yahweh saving them,  
and the walls of water crashing down on Egypt.

They still remembered the awful sight and smell of

Thousands of dead soldiers floating on the warm sea.

*They was no treatment for PTSD in 1500 BC.*

But Israel marched on.

Into the desert wilderness. Day after day.

What little water they could get tasted awful. 1

And they ran out of food. 2

They were saved. But... No food. No water. No rest.

Saved for what? To die in the desert?

I don't blame them for asking God "What's up?"

I don't blame them for thinking

they should have stayed on as slaves. 3

*... that's a big question!*

*It's quite a story.*

When we read the Bible we often see what we want to see. 4

But it's helpful to see things as Israel saw them. 5

I know that History is fuzzy. 6

The winners write books, and the losers critique them.

*A few generations after the fact History becomes  
our collective cultural memory.*

*It's memory history. 7*

*WW II. The 60's. Last year's Football season.*

The Old Testament is the Hebrew people's  
collective cultural history.

The Israelites had a rough time.

They were, at the end of their rope.

So, at a place Moses called "Massah And Meribah"

*... "Testing, And Quarrelling". 8*

they stopped walking, and they stood their ground.

And when they complained, God listened.

Yahweh gave them what they needed. *But not a lot more.*

Sometimes God tests us. Sometimes God leaves us hanging.

*That can be kind of irritating.*<sup>9</sup>

It's inconvenient. It can be scary.

It's not like we don't have reasons to be angry and afraid.

We do.

But we also have reasons to be faithful.

Good reasons.

We have good reasons to take chance on God.

We have good reasons to get out of the boat,

In the middle of the lake, and step onto the waves.<sup>10</sup>

Lots of people want to prove that the Bible is literal history,

But nobody knows where the place Moses called

"Massah and Meribah" was, or is.<sup>11</sup>

People look for a tiny splinter they can say is a

remnant of Noah's ark.

People look for a piece of the True Cross.<sup>12</sup>

People suggest that the Shroud of Turin is Jesus' burial robe.<sup>13</sup>

But even if it isn't.

Even if the Bible isn't a pure history Book.

Even if we don't find Noah's ark.

Even if the True Cross is long gone.

I know that God's hand is in Creation, and that Jesus is Lord.

I know that the story of Massah and Meribah still matters.

The Israelites quarreled 3000 years ago.

These *are* days of *Testing and Strife*.

People still quarrel. People still test God. 14  
We've made conflict an art form.  
*Not a rare art form, mind you.*

No one is immune to *Testing and Strife*.

Certainly not me.

It happens to even the most faithful and loving of us. 15

Life is tumultuous.

I remember The Red Menace. I remember "duck and cover"?  
... and Y2K. Earthquakes. Floods. Fires. *And Klingons.*

I've had the same girlfriend for 35 happy years.

I've got lots of education and the blessing of ordination,

I can still find reasons to be grouchy. *Unbelievable!*

And it isn't just me. It's life. Life tests us.

So, the today's message is simple:

It's OK to be human. It's OK to quarrel.

It's OK to make mistakes.

We all do. We always will.

But when we do, Jesus always calls us back to where we were,  
with our family and our friends and our co-workers.

Abraham Lincoln famously said, that we are God's

**"almost chosen people"**. And We are.

And because we are, we have a lot of work to do. 16

Let's set aside our political quarrels and worries.

Let's go forward to build God's Kingdom,

Serving God's people, with joy in our hearts.

Right here. Right now.

- Finis

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1 Exodus 15:24, 17:1-3.

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2 Exodus 16:2-3.

3 Exodus 14:11-12.

4 Some Christians say the Bible was dictated from the mouth of God. Some people see the Bible as a great work of fiction, i.e., *The Bible as Literature*. Ironically, conservative Christians typically rely on the King James Version (KJV), which is Anglican.

In 1526 the Anglican Church was still in upheaval – just a few years before “Bloody” Queen Mary I (a Roman Catholic) had executed nearly 250 Protestants (her successor, Queen Elizabeth, re-affirmed her father’s (Henry VII) Anglican Church.) In the midst of this tumult the classic languages (Latin, Greek and Hebrew) were rediscovered and the translation of ancient writings became increasingly popular.

William Tyndale’s Bible was published and known as the “Geneva Bible”, developed by followers of Calvin, whom Mary had banished to Switzerland. Because some read the Geneva Bible as hostile to the author of both secular (such as England’s Kings and Queens, and their religious appointees – swarming hordes of “Prelates” dominating the Church—James felt the need to publish his own version.... *and he did*. The King James Version (KJV), circa 1611, *is therefore Anglican*.

The KJV wasn’t the first Bible and it isn’t the last! Indeed, the Episcopal Church authorizes not only the KJV- it’s historic Bible - but also the English Revision (1881), the American Revision (1901), the Revised Standard Version (1952) and the Jerusalem Bible (1966), New English Bible with the Apocrypha (1970), Good News Bible / Today’s English Version (1976), New American Bible (1970), Revised Standard Version, an Ecumenical Edition (1973), New International Version (1978), New Jerusalem Bible (1987), Revised English Bible (1989), New Revised Standard Version (1990) and the Common English Bible (2012).

<https://episcopalchurch.org/bibl>

So, while it’s easy to get drawn into Bible debates, we must remember that we are not called to talk *at* folks; we are called to talk *with* folks, to share our understanding of the Lord’s work and His call on us as believers. When we come to the Table on Sunday, we find The Lord there. *We aren’t free to go back to the world on Monday as if Sunday never happened*.

5 Some people see the Bible or think about the Bible, at all. They are our “market”!

6 I love reading history. The Civil War. The Great War. WW II. Ancient Greece. And then there is post War French philosophy.

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7 See, mnemohistory.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01629770802468865?journalCode=rba120>

8 וּמִרְיָבָה מִטָּה, πειρασμὸς καὶ λοιδóρησις, “testing and contention”. See, also, Exodus 17:7, Deuteronomy 33:8 and Psalm 95:8. See also, for Massah, Deuteronomy 6:16, and 9:22, and Meribah, Numbers 20:13, 24; Psalms 81:7 and 106:32.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/encyclopedia-of-the-bible/Massah-Meribah>

9 Do you ever watch the News, God???

10 Like St. Peter.

11 Somewhere near Mt. Horeb, aka Mt. Sinai, where Moses struck the rock to obtain water.

12 Another piece!

13 I'd love that to be true.

14 -- believers and non-believers alike.

15 “Even the most grateful and faithful of us quarrel”.

<https://www.cathedralatl.org/Sermons/testing-and-quarreling-massah-and-meribah/>

16 President-elect Abraham Lincoln's address to the New Jersey State Senate, Trenton, New Jersey, February 21, 1861:

“Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Senate of the State of New-Jersey: I am very grateful to you for the honorable reception of which I have been the object. I cannot but remember the place that New-Jersey holds in our early history. In the early Revolutionary struggle, few of the States among the old Thirteen had more of the battle-fields of the country within their limits than old New-Jersey. May I be pardoned if, upon this occasion, I mention that away back in my childhood, the earliest days of my being able to read, I got hold of a small book, such a one as few of the younger members have ever seen, "Weem's Life of Washington."

I remember all the accounts there given of the battle fields and struggles for the liberties of the country, and none fixed themselves upon my imagination so deeply as the struggle here at Trenton, New-Jersey. The crossing of the river; the contest with the Hessians; the great hardships endured at that time, all fixed themselves on my memory more than any single revolutionary event; and you all know, for you have all been boys, how these early impressions last longer than any others. I recollect thinking then, boy even though I was, that there must have been something

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more than common that those men struggled for; that something even more than National Independence; that something that held out a great promise to all the people of the world to all time to come; I am exceedingly anxious that this Union, the Constitution, and the liberties of the people shall be perpetuated in accordance with the original idea for which that struggle was made, and *I shall be most happy indeed if I shall be an humble instrument in the hands of the Almighty, and of this, his almost chosen people, for perpetuating the object of that great struggle.* (emphasis added). ....

See, <http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/trenton1.htm>