

Septuagesima Sunday  
1/27/2013  
Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church  
Exodus 17:1-7  
David McMinn

I bring you grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Word of God for our consideration this morning is from the Old Testament book of Exodus the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter.

The Wilderness of Sin was the place where Israel camped after being brought out of slavery in Egypt. It was there that they grumbled to God about the lack of food. Now you have to understand that it wasn't that they were about to starve to death. They had cattle and other livestock with them. They could and did eat at that point. But they romanticized the conditions they left behind in Egypt. They wished to go back to what they were use to. Never mind that by leaving Egypt and fulfilling the Passover meal they were spared the death of their firstborn. They conveniently forgot that little detail and grumbled against God and Moses and Aaron.

Israel left the Wilderness of Sin after God brought about the miracle of manna and quail. God heard their grumbling and though it was unwarranted He provided miraculous food for them to eat. For 40 years they would be fed in this manner. God again proved faithful in providing for His people just as He had since He made His covenant with Abraham. The people left the Wilderness of Sin and headed to a new place.

*"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. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And 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 grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me. And the Lord said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.*

*<sup>7</sup>And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the Lord by saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"*

The people of Israel headed toward Rephidim and again they complained. They voiced the complaint that now they were going to die of thirst. Before it was food now it was water. Before God was with them and He provided for their needs. Now they complain of the lack of water as though He would let them die thirsting. Notice what Moses says at the end. Notice that the problem isn't water. The problem wasn't food, it's something else. "...*they tested the Lord by saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"*

Remember when you were a kid and you were left in that dark room by yourself at night and you could swear you saw things in the shadows or heard

noises in the room? And you would want to call out for mom and dad and sometimes maybe you did and maybe sometimes you didn't, but still all you wanted to know was that they were there if you needed them. For most kids it's not a question. Their parents are going to be there for them. If they cry out mom and dad will answer if in fact they don't come running down the hall to see what's the matter. And hey we were satisfied even if they just hollered out and told us to go to sleep. We just wanted to know they were there and heard us.

Israel had the cloud following them by day and the pillar of fire following them at night. This was God's sign for them at all times that He was with Israel. They had an active sign that let them know God was there providing for them, keeping them safe and leading them in the way to go. But it wasn't enough. They would imagine all kinds of ways that things would go bad. Yes God fed us when we complained, but maybe He isn't with us anymore. Yes we see the sign He's given us, but maybe He isn't here anymore. Yes we hear God's man speak to us, but maybe God isn't with us anymore.

You know that feeling? Ever wonder if God was there? In your finances you see the light at the end of the tunnel and every time the light seems to be getting closer it suddenly takes a step back. Some other expense occurs and you think this'll be the one that sinks you. In your health you find out that some other something has been detected and it'll have to be treated, maybe it's serious, maybe it will heal, maybe not. In your family your loved one dies and the hurt just seems to go on and on and nothing seems right and nothing seems

worth doing. Or maybe it's just a bout of the blues or depression and you wonder, is God there? Is God with ME anymore?

Israel asked the question: "*Is the Lord with us or not?*" God answered them. He told their man of God to pass before them along with the elders of Israel and Moses did so and took the staff as God commanded him and he went to this rock and Moses struck it and water flowed out. The thing they thought they needed more than anything else was provided to them by this rock. The water flowed and they and their animals drank to their hearts' desire. The Lord was with them and He was with them in the Rock and He was with them in Christ.

"Oh, Pastor, the text doesn't say anything about Christ." Oh, my friends but it does! Our epistle said about this very Rock, "*I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.*" See even then there was more to the Love of God than just providing food and water. Yes God does those things, and yes those things easily become the things we love as do our health, finances and family members. But those things are just the icing on God's cake for us.

The Israelites thought they needed water to drink more than anything else. They thought God abandoned them. But the whole time He was with them not just according to His creative power (power to make water come from a rock) but

in His redemptive power as well. The Second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God, the Christ was with them, saving them. What good would it do if God merely provided for your clothing, shelter and food if in the end He just condemns you to hell? Not much right? And the flipside of that is if God provides for your salvation, if He forgives your sins in Christ, why would He not at the same time take care of your immediate physical needs?

God is with you. He is among us. “God daily and richly provides shoes and clothing, food and drink, house and farm, spouse and children, fields, livestock, and all property—along with all the necessities and nourishment for this body and life.” But there is more, much more: “He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned human being. He has purchased and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death. He has done all this in order that I may belong to Him, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally.”

God is here preserving you physically but more than that He is here saving you, preserving you for eternal life. Here He richly blesses you through the preaching of His Word, the washing of Baptism and the nourishment of the Lord’s Supper. God provides all that you need for this life and for the next. His idea is to save you from your sins and in the Rock Jesus Christ He has done just that.

And if that weren't enough He gives you the signs that He is here. Is His Word not preached? Is His Baptism not administered? Are you not fed on the body and blood of Christ? Have you not received in these means the crucified and risen Christ?

God is with you. He is here among us just as He has promised He would be. He hears your pleas for mercy and He gives you all that is needed to sustain spirit and body through all the days of your life and even into the next. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.