

# Scripture Readings and Sermon

*September 27, 2020 by Rev. Mark Brechin*

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

(Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

While the place names of Sin, Rephidim, Horeb, Massah, and Meribah were well known at the time when the stories of Exodus were written down (they first existed as oral stories passed down), these place names have shifted over time and conquerors. Faith and not geography is the point of the text. When the Israelites first encountered a need for water, they went to an oasis that God made safe to drink (Exodus 15:23-27). At Rephidim, however, they have moved into rockier terrain where an oasis is hard to find and water is apparently scarce. The people do not just complain but they "quarreled" (Meribah) and "tested" (Massah) the LORD. The same Greek word for test is used to describe Jesus' experience with Satan in the desert. The end of verse 7 indicates that this testing and quarreling was rooted in a fear that the LORD was no longer with the people. They have shifted from complaining about Moses to realizing their survival depends upon the LORD. An almost identical scene can be found in Numbers 20:7-13 but this time the "Meribah" is between the LORD and Moses because in that case Moses was not suppose to strike the rock. There is an important distinction in the ancient mind which should be lifted up at this time. The difference between magic and a miracle is that magic is a ritual which results in a predictable supernatural event. In magic, the power is in the person and the objects of the ritual. A miracle is a gift from God and not controlled by rituals or people. By performing the "ritual" of striking the staff in Numbers in the same way he did in this passage, Moses claimed the power of giving water.

Exodus 17:7 "Is the LORD among us or not?"

During times of uncertainty, it is not surprising to hear people ask if the LORD is here.  
When have you questioned whether God was still listening?  
Have you experienced a "dark night of the soul" when pray seems empty?  
When have you quarreled with God? Have you stopped because it seems pointless?  
Can you have faith and test God?

## **Commentary on Matthew 21:23-32** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The lectionary reading jumps over the triumphal entry into Jerusalem (read on Palm Sunday) at the beginning of the chapter, and joins the story after Jesus curses the fig tree outside of Bethany. Faced with the healing of the blind man before the triumphal entry and then Jesus' cleansing of temple along with further healing of the blind and the lame, the leaders gather together to challenge Jesus' authority in this section. Rather than answering directly, Jesus challenges them to define authority based upon the righteousness of John the Baptist. After they shrewdly refuse to answer, Jesus then defines righteousness not by stated intention but by action. This ties back to his definition of cleanliness coming from the heart and his description of righteous fruit coming from a righteous tree. While the mouth may tell pretty lies, the hands act upon the conviction of the heart. Thus while the leaders talk of repentance and then reject John the Baptist, those who were in need of repentance relented and believed. Jesus' authority comes from the One who can transform the hardened heart to a faithful heart and bring the sinner to repentance.

Matthew 21:29 "later he changed his mind and went."

The older you get, do you find yourself more hesitant to commit?  
Is it sometimes wiser to take your time to make sure you can do the job properly?  
What does this mean when we say yes to Jesus?  
Jesus kept calling the disciples to follow him even after they left the nets.

Is he still calling you?

**Commentary on Philippians 2:1–13** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The middle part of this passage (5-11) is an early hymn of the church that also served as an early statement of faith. While this section is read during Passion week, the lectionary expands it to place the hymn with the context of Paul's encouragement to live a life worthy of Christ. This life within the body means to have the same mind and the same love. A mind based not on human pride but on the humility of Jesus. Jesus was in the "form of God" and equal with God but experienced the extent of human suffering on the cross. God who is infinite experienced mortal suffering in Jesus. Once God was done with this human form, God did not discard the humanity of Jesus but raised the human form to heaven in the mystery of the "ascension". The woundedness of humanity in the marks of the nails is now part of God in Jesus. It is through Jesus' humanity that all of humanity may enter into God's glory. Thus, putting on the same love and mind of Jesus means to enter into the brokenness of our community as brothers and sisters with fear and trembling knowing that God is working in us and through us. This is a life worthy of Christ because it humbly continues the loving work of salvation demonstrated by Jesus.

Philippians 2:2 "be of the same mind, having the same love"

Based on this passage, if Jesus had a facebook page what would he post?

How would his humility comfort or convict us?

How would his assurance of God's love make us feel about our own faith?

Do we have the same mind and same love in all that we do?

What does it mean in light of this to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling"?

**Sermon "What Blinds Us"** ([Sermon Video](#))

The thirst of the Israelite people in the desert, the arrogance of the Temple officials, and the pride of the Philippians were all blinded to seeing God with them. We desperately need grace because we face a legion of obstacles between us and God. The truth is most of these obstacles are not external but rather internal.

The psychologist Abraham Maslow in 1943 decided to shift the current discussion in his field from psychopathology which focus on what is wrong with people to psychological growth which builds a persons sense of self. What he created soon became known as Maslow's hierarchy of needs. These needs move from the basic physiological needs of food, drink, shelter, and clothing to the realization of a person's potential. While psychology seeks to enable people to satisfy these needs within a societal framework, scripture argues that all such frameworks are faulty unless they are grounded upon the ultimate reality of God.

The Israelite people were faced with meeting their basic needs of food, water, and safety. God had provided them safety at the Red Sea. In the quail and the manna, the people were beginning to trust that God would feed them but would God give them water? Their quarreling and test of God is summed up in verse seven, "Is the Lord with us or not?" Their basic needs blinded them to the fact that God was with them. It is when these needs are threatened that many enter into a crisis of faith. From natural disasters to the diagnosis of a fatal disease, people suddenly find that their world has dramatically shrunk down to just the essentials. During this current pandemic, the question concerning what is essential has become the main topic of conversation. While the world struggles with the answer, the scriptures boldly proclaim that the one thing that is essential is God. God alone is with us from beginning to the end. It was God who made our physiological needs and it is God who provides for them if we seek God's guidance and wisdom.

For those that have these basic needs met, the next level of needs identified by Maslow are grouped together as psychological needs. The need to belong and the need for self esteem are

considered levels three and four of this hierarchy of needs. Growing up in Jerusalem as one of the chosen families, the men serving the Temple felt both a sense of belonging and a sense of self esteem. When Jesus entered into Jerusalem, cleansed the Temple, and began healing, he challenged everything these men were taught about who they were and about the institution they belonged. Jesus threatened their self identity and so they responded by questioning who he was and to what did he belong. Their sense of self defined by their society blinded them to God with them. The institution that they served whose purpose was to serve God actually blinded them to the presence of God. This is true within religious organizations as well as communities and nationalities. Our sense of belonging and self identification as a Christian or American or Texan or whatever label is used blinds us to who we are in the eyes of God. As children of God, we are all called to work in the vineyard and we are all in need of repentance. Our station in society does not limit or guarantee our place in God's kingdom. It is when we do the Father's will and live according to the example of Jesus that we begin to find out where we truly belong and who we truly are in this world.

The final level, self-actualization is when we begin to realize our full potential. By God's grace and the work of the Holy Spirit, the Philippians were beginning to understand all the gifts they had received in Jesus Christ. Paul, however, could see that this self-actualization could become a trap of self centeredness which would blind them to God's grace. An inflated sense of self importance within their community and even between members of the congregation would soon begin to rip them apart. Paul urged them not only to be of the same mind and same heart but to above all take on the humility of Jesus. If there was ever an example of self-actualization, it was Jesus. This was not to be exploited but rather Jesus realized his full potential by emptying himself and becoming obedient to the Father's will. Our full potential is not in some form of heroic individualism celebrated by our culture but as children of God who do our Father's will.

True seeing comes not from a quest for self-actualization but through prayer with the One who made us, given us our talents, and placed in his kingdom. The humble act of prayer that is more about listening than asking is the path to finding all our needs met. In God we find our belonging and our calling, our safety and our daily bread, our sense of who we are and who we can become. The choice, however, is ultimately yours. Will you seek to meet your needs through a broken world or will you seek the kingdom of God?