

“Is the Lord Among Us or Not?”

Our Old Testament Readings of late have been following the Children of Israel in their wilderness wanderings. We have seen Moses as he has led them through the Exodus from Egypt. Imagine moving close to 2.5 million people from a land of bondage, in the middle of the night, and complete this task where no Israelite is lost. Imagine being rescued from the pursuing enemy, hot on their trail. Imagine walking on solid dry ground that had previously been on the bottom of a sea. Imagine seeing your enemy perish before your very eyes!

They wander through a wilderness of hard clay, where no food grows and no civilization builds a town or village. The people complain—there was no food to eat. But God would hear their cry and mercifully grant them quail in the evening and manna in the morning.

In our Old Testament reading today, we hear of another complaint: the lack of water. Remember, we have those 2.5 million people, plus their flocks and herds that need water. They start looking for drinking fountains, vending machines, McDonald’s, and Speedways along the path, but none are to be found. There are no oases, no pond, lakes, rivers, or streams. It’s just a dry, hard ground of clay.

“Give us water to drink.” The people murmured against Moses, complaining to him that he had brought them out of Egypt to die in the wilderness. “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”

To provide enough water for every man, woman, and child, plus animals, with an estimate of say 10 gallons of water times that 2.5 million, we are looking at providing 25 million gallons of water per day. La Porte’s water treatment plant processes about 5.5-6 million gallons of water today for a population of around 22,000, or ~0.009 of the Children of Israel, with a usage is about 55 gallons of water per person per day. Subtract the fact that the people of La Porte use water for laundry, bathing, washing dishes, flushing toilets, and taking long showers,

besides washing cars, the use of water in Bible times was considerably less than today.

The people are about ready to stone Moses. They think his GPS got them steered in the wrong direction. It wasn't recalculating to find the nearest Family Express, Starbucks, or Kroger store. They were traveling this direction according to the commandment of the Lord.

Moses, in desperation cries out to the Lord, **“What shall I do with this people?”** They were God's treasured possession, as Moses would be told by God Himself. He was leading them and testing them to Mt. Sinai where they would hear this gracious news.

God instructed Moses to gather representatives from each tribe and gather at the rock at Horeb. This was near the same place where God had visited Moses some 40 years before when He spoke to him from a burning bush. Yes, Moses was familiar with the territory, so Moses knew he was leading them on the right path. Moses didn't need a GPS; he did not have to have his route recalculated.

“Take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile...strike the rock and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” God instructed and Moses did so. What came was water in abundance, all through the days of their journeying in the wilderness.

But Moses would name that place in their journey: Massah, which means 'quarreling,' and Meribah, which means 'testing.' Moses would remind the Children of Israel of these times of testing and quarreling and recall what God had done to preserve their lives.

Later in the journey through the wilderness, the same water issue would come up again, and Moses, angered with the faithlessness of Israel, struck the rock again, but had been told by God to speak to the rock. By that act of disobedience, Moses would not lead the people of Israel into the Promised Land.

The Apostle Paul writes, reflecting on the journey of the Children of Israel in 1st Corinthians: **“For 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.

Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.”

We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

The woman at the well of Jacob did speak to the Rock, and that rock was Christ! Yet she had indulged in sexual immorality, as Jesus would so judge her. She would attempt to test Christ, but wrestled with understanding just what kind of water it was the Jesus was offering her.

This nameless woman was a Samaritan, and by some Jewish standards would be called a Gentile. Jesus was offering this Gentile the grace that God has for all people. The woman was coming to this well in mid day, after everyone had gathered in the early morning or would gather at in the evening, to get her water. She knew how her reputation would cause others to shun her. Jesus, as the all-knowing Son of God, would sit at that well to meet this very woman for this reason of dialoging with her about her very life, her very sinful and empty life.

“Give Me a drink,” Jesus asked the woman. That was no different than the request made by the Children of Israel when they asked Moses in the heat of their day. The woman is taken aback by Jesus’ request, seeing the conflict between the Jews and Samaritans, as well as the gender differences between man and woman. But Jesus presses forward, telling her, **“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.”**

Hmm. Living water? We ask the typical Lutheran question, *“What does that mean?”* The woman looks at Jesus, sitting by the well of Jacob that has supplied water for all these years, and notices that Jesus doesn’t have any vessel or instrument by which to get any water at all. **“Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?”**

There may have been a slight pause between this question and the next one, where she asked, **“Are you greater than our father Jacob?”**

Inside, Jesus was probably thinking, *“Yes, I AM greater than Jacob.”* But He withholds this identity and allows the woman to continue. She explains how Jacob had built that well centuries ago and how it has served them.

But Jesus wants her to think of heavenly things, not earthly things. He wants her to get her mind off the lifestyle of this world and to think of eternal life. **“Everyone who drinks this water from Jacob’s well, who has been dead all these years, will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”**

Wouldn’t you like to have that water too, just like the Samaritan woman? She would just love to have that supply and not have to risk embarrassment in going to this well in her sinfulness. Yet Jesus would need to test her. He asks her to get her husband, for a man to speak to a woman in a public place without her husband would not be proper etiquette. The woman responds that she does not have a husband, to which Jesus now enters with His knowledge about her sinful past.

“You have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband.” Jesus knew that this woman’s spiritual GPS was in serious need of recalculation. Her moral compass way off, and without correction, would lead her into spiritual darkness and eternal death. Her life had been ruined by sin. Jesus knew that the man she calls her husband has been gained either by covetousness in breaking the 10th Commandment, or she has been unfaithful to her previous husbands, committing adultery, breaking the 6th Commandment. We let the judgment be our Lord’s.

But whatever the judgment, the woman admits her guilt, saying, **“I perceive that you are a prophet.”** But then she diverts the attention from herself to the worship wars that existed between the Jews who claim Mount Zion in Jerusalem as the one place of worship versus Mount Gerazim in the heart of Samaria where the Samaritans have worshiped. Jesus would put that argument to rest, saying that those who worship God must worship in spirit and in truth, trusting in God above all things. Here Jesus would point out that among the Jews there was idolatry in their worship, thus breaking of the 1st Commandment!

Have we been guilty of that? Take heed lest we fall, St. Paul would warn us. Jesus wants us to get our minds off the lifestyle of this world and to think of eternal life. We are justified by faith, thus granting us peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus was sent to die for the ungodly, those who practice idolatry, and even those who dabble in idolatry, small and insignificant as we might think. Don’t we test God as did the Children of Israel in our Meribahs and do we not complain and murmur against God as did the Children of Israel in our Massahs? Are we lead to despair and complain, **“Is the Lord among us or not?”** as we experience the hardships of life, the testing of our faith, the ruin of our economy, the destruction of our world, the report of yet another fatal accident on our local highway, the break up in our family, the loss of our health? Do we keep coming to our earthly wells to draw water, and are continually thirsting for more?

We come to this place in our earthly wilderness, knowing here Christ offers us the living waters of His Word and Holy Sacraments. Someone greater than Jacob is here at this well, the well of eternal life. Eternal

life flows from the cross; its blessings are pooled up in the waters of baptism. It is served in the body and blood of our Lord in His Supper. Eternal life is given in the spoken word of absolution. Yes, the Lord is among us where He has told us where we would see and find Him. May we look for Him at His well, and leave our earthly water pot and sinful life to receive His living water of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

“Is the Lord among us?” we ask. We hear Jesus’ response: **“I who speak to you am that Messiah.”** Jesus told this to the nameless woman. Jesus tells you the same today, but gives you His very name. The Lord is among us. By His grace and presence, we can rejoice in our sufferings. Our sufferings would lead us to know our thirsts, thirsts for the righteousness of God. **“Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”**

The Psalmist writes, **“As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God”** (Psalm 42:1-2). Our Introit Psalm said, **“My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord”** (Psalm 84:2). Panting, thirsting, and fainting for that living God are ways to desire that living water, seen only in Jesus, who gave His life for the ungodly and sinners of this world. Jesus sits at this earthly well to show that He is the one who provides the true living water that wells up to eternal life. That perpetual tide of living water was poured out when our Savior died. It pours out for me and for you! Jesus is your fountain in life’s dreary desert, giving you refreshment for your soul. No longer do you live in the delusion of sin as the nameless woman at the well; you live as one redeemed by Christ the crucified! Your spiritual GPS is now recalculated by this Gospel and leads you to Jesus Christ!

May the living God of salvation grant you faith to trust Him, not to test Him. May the one greater than Jacob, Jesus the Messiah, grant you endurance, character, and hope, so that you are not put to shame as you confess your God before others. May God’s Spirit cause you to thirst for the righteousness that God gives, giving you faith to believe and courage to confess Jesus as your only Lord and Savior. Amen.