

Sermon for Proper 21A

The Text: Exodus 17:1-7

If you go on the internet you can find photos of rocks that people believe are the rock that Moses struck with his staff!

People have actually spent time looking for that rock—maybe because they feel that finding it will help them and others believe what the Bible says. Maybe they've looked for that rock to get some assurance that God is real and with them.

It's a pretty interesting account—a rather strange thing! Life-giving water coming from a rock in a desert. You could wonder why God chose a rock and instead didn't just ask Moses to strike the ground!

A rock is an unusual source!

But it was a rock that Moses struck and water came out of it for the people to drink. This not only met their need for physical refreshment it answered their question—"Is the Lord among us or not?" The water from the rock put their doubts about God and what He intends for them, to rest—for a while, at least.

The Israelites were a bit out of line grumbling the way they did! This is chapter 17. It was only in chapter 14 that God parted the Red Sea for them to escape the Egyptians. In chapter 15 when they were thirsty, they grumbled and God provided water for them to drink. In chapter 16 when they were hungry, they grumbled and God provided manna & quail to eat!

Despite the way God had dealt with them in the past; despite him always providing—here in chapter 17 they're at the grumbling again! The default position of God's Old Testament people was a lack of trust in God. Doubt about his presence with them and his intentions. Their default position involved worry, fear, and forgetting God's goodness. Thanksgiving was severely lacking.

Now I think it's pretty hard if not impossible for us to relate to the Israelites' experience. We haven't seen and experienced amazing things in the same way they did. And I don't think too many of us would've ever experienced being out in the desert, without any water! I've never wanted for food or drink. I've never been without a roof over my head! So I can't relate to their experience of hardship and desperation that led them to grumble and ask the question "Is the Lord among us or not?"

I've lived a life that when you compare it to lives lived throughout the millennia could be summed up with one word: "COMFORTABLE"!

But that doesn't mean I've never grumbled and never wondered if God is with me!

The comfortable and affluent western life-style that we live can be spiritually dangerous because there can be so many distractions, and it can be so comfortable, that we can get sucked into forgetting that we are desperately in need of God, and we are utterly dependent on him graciously providing for us!

There's nothing wrong with being well-off and comfortable, but we all know that it's no cure for grumbling. And it doesn't prevent us from sometimes forgetting about God all together!

We can easily find ourselves grumbling instead of thanking, worrying instead of trusting, and doubting God and what he intends for us—questioning if he is really with us, instead of being confident of his presence and his purpose for our lives. Like the Israelites we can forget the amazing things God has done for us in the past—the prayers he's answered and the help he's graciously provided us. Our default position can be to grumble about how things are now, and how things are looking for the future; but how about the amazing things God has done for us?

God has always provided for his people. He's provided for you and me! And he'll continue to provide what only he knows is best for us, in this life and the next.

We might not be as physically thirsty as the Israelites were, but because of sin, we have a deep spiritual thirst. Who can put an end to our grumbling and worrying, and fear for the future? Who can satisfy us spiritually and give us peace? Only a gracious God who's willing to provide for undeserving people. Only a gracious God who **is** among us!

People have looked for that rock in the desert, but we know the answer for us is to look to THE Rock! The Lord, the Rock of our Salvation, who came to be among us, walking in the flesh, and was put on a cross where he was struck!

He's an unusual source to quench thirst— a dying Lord – but water flowed from his side there and water still flows! "I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit". (John 3:5). The water of Holy Baptism has flowed over you! You are safe in the spiritual Rock that is Christ! You're baptised! Jesus says: "whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life". (John 4:14)

At your baptism you were given more than just water, you were given the Holy Spirit to live in you! A spring of water welling up to eternal life! But it wasn't just water that poured from Jesus' side on the cross. Blood flowed from the Rock of our Salvation, too, and blood still flows! Is the Lord among us? He is, every time he feeds us not with manna but with his true body, and to give us not just wine, but his true blood for us to drink!

What an astonishing thing! Life-giving water and cleansing blood coming from a spiritual Rock who hung on a cross! You could wonder why God chose this way – it's an unusual source! And he still brings us this life and cleansing through his means of grace—his Word and Sacraments are real and they give life and peace and purpose! They give us hearts that are empowered to trust and to give thanks! Because through these means the risen Lord is among us to fix our thoughts on the most amazing thing that ever happened: Our sin was paid for, our death was defeated – because we were died for by him!

You are baptised! God is with you and speaks his Word to you today! He provides to satisfy your spiritual hunger and thirst. You are forgiven, you are his, you are loved, and you will live forever! So now, despite our circumstances we have certainty that God is with us!

We know God will provide for us and meet our truest needs in the ways that he knows best!

We're free to thank God – instead of grumble! We've been empowered by the Spirit of God to trust in Him and wait on Him instead of worrying and being afraid!

You have THE rock – Jesus! Look always to him! Amen.