

Among Us Or Not

Exodus 17:1-7

October 1, 2017

First United Methodist Church, Lindstrom

(This is a manuscript prepared for sermon delivery and may not represent actual words spoken.)

And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the Lord saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

Okay...I have to confess that I have always been a bit hard on the Israelites. Shame on me for that. My criticism of them stops today. I repent. I mean, you know the story of Exodus. Right? Is not the story of Exodus a story of deliverance and grace and mercy and all that? God delivered his people from a difficult four hundred years of bondage. God was taking them to a better place. It was a land flowing with milk and honey. It was the Promised Land. Yet all along the journey the people did nothing but complain. There were times when they wished things were as they had once been...like they thought perhaps it wasn't so bad back in Egypt...even though they had witnessed and had experienced God's provision and protection.

Yep...a bunch of whiners. Then I thought about it. You know, all along my journey of following Jesus, I have witnessed and have experienced God's provision and protection. And yet I have done my share of whining and grumbling against God...and doubting God. Why is that?

So, as I said, we know the story quite well. God's people had been in Egypt for a few hundred years. Their stay there started out just fine...early on...when Joseph had a leadership position. But time passed. The kings of Egypt forgot the days of Joseph. They subjected God's people to hard labor. Their fear was these descendants of Abraham might rise up and try to take over the land. So they were treated as slaves. It was tough.

Then God raised up Moses to lead his people out of Egypt. Moses would lead them to

the Promised Land...the land where Abraham used to live until they all moved to Egypt because of that famine we read about at the end of Genesis. Pharaoh at first refused to let the people go. Then came the plagues. With the last plague—the death of the firstborn—Pharaoh let the people go. But then he had second thoughts. He sent his army after them. That was when the Red Sea was parted and Moses led the people through the sea on dry ground. When the Egyptian army pursued, the waters closed over them.

So the people saw how God was taking care of them. Right? You'd think they would take a bit of encouragement in that. You'd think they would be satisfied and grateful. Right?

Nope. First it was water. They travelled for a few days and had trouble finding water. Understandable. They came to a place where there was water. But it was bitter. They complained. Again...a bit understandable. God gave Moses a stick. Moses tossed the stick into the water. The water became sweet. They then came to a place where there were palm trees and twelve springs of water. They camped there awhile. So now they would know God was taking care of them. Right?

Nope. There was the bread and meat thing. Manna and quail. Not quite two months into the journey the people thought it would have been better if they had died in Egypt. At least in Egypt they had meat. They had all the food they wanted. That, they concluded, was better than starving to death in the desert. So God gave them bread and meat. Surely now they would know they were in good hands...God's hands. Right?

Nope. They got thirsty again. God had already provided them with water. But they complained again. They accused Moses of