

**Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church**

**Rev. Dr. Daris Bultena**

**September 28, 2008**

**26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**Exodus 17:1-7**

<sup>1</sup>From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. <sup>2</sup>The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" <sup>3</sup>But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" <sup>4</sup>So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." <sup>5</sup>The LORD said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. <sup>6</sup>I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. <sup>7</sup>He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

**Isaiah 43:16-21**

Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.

I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.

**To Live Abundantly and Serve With Abandon  
Changing Lives and Growing in God's Love**

**Plagues. Passover. Release. Red Sea opened up and closed again, manna from heaven—and now thirsty in the camp at Rephidim. Moses, Moses, Moses.**

**Moses. You remember how it all started. “Take off your shoes, you are on holy ground. I am the God of your Father; I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. I will be with you.”**

**And now thirsty in the camp at Rehidim—ah, they discover that there is the challenge. The challenge is the scarcity of resources. No water here. Mouths are a-thirsty.**

**Moses is that dynamic leader who is able to pull the people together, define principles and purpose, define a mission strategy, lay out long term goals, and follow through—yeah, not quite.**

**Instead we find Moses and, as the writer of the book of Exodus puts it, “the whole congregation of the Israelites” quarreling. Church folk: quarreling. Now imagine that. They are quarreling over the fact that they are thirsty. There is no good source of water here. And so they do what the whole congregation of Presbyterians—I mean Israelites—does when there is a scarcity of resources—they quarrel and blame.**

**Now one would think that in times of transition—and we are in one of those epochs of time here too—not only for the Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church and its amazingly talented, called, energetic, full-of-life Pastor—but for all of us—for the whole Church and even for the whole congregation of the Israelites we are talking about a true shift—an in the wilderness movement where we are not where we were, we aren’t going back there, but we sure are not in the promised land yet.**

**One would think that in those times we would remember the God of our mother Sarah, remember the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob—and in that memory we would find our missional identity in such a way that we can trust that the very one who gave us manna in the wilderness and set our feet down in this place—Good Shepherd—holy ground—that in That Very One we would take our confidence and place our trust.**

**But where is the water to come from? Our mouths are dry now. Whole congregation of Israel, our mouths are dry now. There are empty pews or at least not full ones. Everything costs more than it ever costs before---it's not just pension dues and power bills that cost, but the cost of leadership, the cost of time, the cost of transformation, the cost of change. The cost of living in a world where we do not know what will happen next.**

**Where is the water to come from? So they quarreled. Moses and the whole congregation.**

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**While the people are quarreling and Moses is stymied by the whole mess—God, the Lord of all is not put off, not angered, and not thrown. God has a way! Hear that—God has a way! God has a way for them. God has a way for us! If you get nothing else today—get that: God has a way for you, and God has a way for us!**

**And that way is not nebulous—but specific and clear.**

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**But before we can be clear on where we fit in this text—let us first get something else clear. As we begin to see ourselves in this text—it is not that I, as your pastor, am Moses. Indeed I have been called and installed to this pulpit and functionally have a particular role. But I am not Moses.**

**And furthermore you are not the children of Israel. Listen, you are not the children of Israel. No—you are not. So who are you? You, and I, together are Moses. You and I together, well we, we are Moses. I am not Moses on my own. You are not Moses on your own. Together we are Moses.**

**Together God has given us this task of delivering this people to the Promised Land. Oh Moses, you and I, we better hear it—God has a plan; God has a way.**

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**And hear it—hear the plan—it is right there in the text.**

**What is the instruction: GO ON AHEAD! Go on ahead.**

**See it, just at that very moment when we, oh Moses, just at that very moment when we are anxious and fearful—it is into that moment that God sends us on ahead.**

**So that is the first instruction for our leadership towards the Promised Land. Get that, leadership—we are called to lead others to the Promised Land. Just at that very time when we tend to hold back and not want to move forward—God calls us forward leading us forward in spite of our level of fear and anxiety.**

**You best not think God is only calling you to take care of your own business—God is calling you to lead others to the Promised Land of belief and life in Christ—it may even be people in your own family that God is calling you to.**

**Do not hang back thinking that someone else will do it—you are called, appointed, and ordained in your baptism to the be one. And your anxieties and fears had better not hold you back because God is clear here with the instruction: Go on ahead!**

**There is something I want to call that—I want to call it serving with abandon—when you risk it—when you bravely speak up and powerfully help and serve others. Serving with abandon. You do not have to worry that you will give too much away or not have enough time or enough**

**energy. Everything you give away comes back to you—each minute, each sacrifice you make comes back to you in blessings 3, 5, 7fold and more.**

**Go on ahead—serve with abandon. When you are thirsty, when your mouth is dry at Rehidim, when your are fearful, when you are anxiously asking yourself what are you going to do? In that moment—in the now, yes. Yes, serve with abandon—go on ahead.**

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**Then what does it say—what is the plan of God—what does it say, “Go on ahead...I will be standing there in front of you.” “I will be standing there in front of you.”**

**God’s faithful presence. Ever and always. God’s faithful presence. Ever and always there.**

**Remember that this is the covenant. What does God say to us in front of the burning bush, Oh Moses, what does God say---“I will be with you.”**

**“Go on ahead and I will be standing there in front of you.”**

**Oh church people, do you have that—God has a way. And God goes ahead of us. And as we move forward—God will be standing there in front of you.**

**That is the power of the church. That is the power that is operative in our lives. That is the power that enables this new purpose of ours as Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church...that new purpose of ours—say it with me, “changing lives and growing in God’s love”—that is the power of this new purpose.**

**“Go on ahead and I will be standing there in front of you.”**

**This purpose will not fail to be fulfilled because God has not shown up for us. God is standing there in front of us waiting for us to go on ahead into our purpose of “changing lives and growing in God’s love.”**

**It is the covenant promise—I will be with you. I will be standing there in front of you.**

**Say that with me: “God is with us. God is standing there in front of us. We will change lives and grow in God’s love.” Say it: “God is with us. God is standing there in front of us. We will change lives and grow in God’s love.”**

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**The question has not changed at all. Not a bid. Not an iota has changed. The question remains the same. “Is the Lord among us or not?”**

**That was their question. I dare say it is still the question. “Is the Lord among us or not.”**

**And it was the question there on the cross. And at the end of the day they walked away in the darkness answering, “No.” But that was not the answer—and those women, praise God for faithful women, those women knew that was not the answer that day there at the empty tomb when they believed and ran to tell the others—“the Lord is risen.”**

**“Is the Lord among us or not?” It is a resounding “Yes!” And that is what enables this life—this really living, living fully and living with abundance.**

**Live with abundance. Abundance is not about how much stuff you have. It isn’t that he with the most toys wins, or even he with the most stable stocks in the stock market, or the most votes, or the most whatever wins....**

**True abundance has to do with that overflowing cuppedness of life. “My cup overflows,” the Psalmist says. It is abundant—it overflows with this sense of the reality of God being among us. God is present. To know that, and claim it, and live your life out of that reality—oh that is living abundantly.**

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**Live abundantly—“Is the Lord among us or not?” “...among us or not?” Oh yes, and you can see it if you look. If you look at your life and see the work...see the results...see the path clear...see the truth of what God is doing in our living.**

**It says it in Isaiah 43:19 “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.”**

**See it clearly---God is doing a new thing, and now it springs forth. ...a way, God has a way. ...a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.**

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**But what do we do? What do we do when we are being those wilderness Presbyterians, when we are being those thirsty people? What do we do when we quarrel with each other and even with ourselves? It says here in Exodus, that there at Rehidim, “the whole company quarreled.” What do we do?**

**It’s all right—fear, anxiety, its okay—we come back, we don’t stop—we go on ahead. God has a way. Go on ahead and God will be standing there in front of you empowering you to live abundantly and serve with abandon the purpose: Changing lives and growing in God’s love.**

**So go on ahead and live it—change lives! Grow in God’s love! Amen.**