



^{on} Sermon 1 October 2017 'Everyone's a Critic'
Exodus 17:1-7 Matthew 21:23-32

Prayer: Draw closer to us, our God, Rock, and Redeemer, for our travels have made us thirsty, our trials have made us weary, our tribulations have pushed us apart; leaving us longing for the nourishment and refreshment that only you can provide. Amen. ^{off}



Everyone's a critic; yep I think all of us here today can identify with moments in our lives when we've felt the truth of this! We heard easily how our given title / theme for today was arrived at, from the Exodus passage. My goodness, did you hear those ancient travellers grumbling and complaining to Moses and YHWH-God. Some of it was fair enough, from the plentiful supplies of the ^{on} 12 wells of Elim to the Desert of Sin, ^{off} half way between Elim and ^{on} Mt Sinai. ^{off}



We know this is at least the second time in about as many months they've complained. Last week we were asked to reflect on their complaints about the lack of bread and meat – and we heard how YHWH-God answered within 24 hours... This week it's water, the **lack** thereof...

It is a little harder to see how the title/ theme came from our New Testament passage – but it's there alright. Everyone- including Jesus is a critic! Now **sometimes** that's the right and just thing to be – and sometimes it's not. This is one of the dilemmas for us today.

For these ancient people, they had left everything behind; including the safety in knowing they were abused / oppressed / murdered for being Abraham's descendants. Were slaves in appalling conditions their books tell us, but **they knew** that life. They were **not** nomads, or desert dwellers, they had to learn how to live in these conditions. They had to learn they could trust YHWH-God for everything, but it was a new learning, a new thing, trusting their God for their daily bread was terrifying.

So they complained – found fault – tested God, again... Last week they complained God had brought them out of Egypt to kill them with hunger. Last week **all** they could remember from Egypt were the fleshpots they sat around eating their fill of... This week God has brought them out **to kill** them **again but** with thirst this time... Did you hear the *escalation* of their criticisms? ^{on} This week not only are they being killed by God by thirst – but so are their children and livestock!!



A few months into their 'exodus' and there are some pretty tough lessons being taught! Both people and God are testing each other *it seems to me*. God is testing the people's commitment to trust and follow **and** the people keep testing YHWH's compassion and provision. And Moses is stuck in the middle! So much so that today we hear how he is **scared** of them stoning him! (*to death* I think are the unwritten words). ^{off}

Life and the experiences of living **force change to / on us**. How we cope, adapt, accept, move forward is a measure of how, **not only** how well we survive, but how we thrive in the new. God wanted his people to do more than survive, he wanted them to thrive, and the only way that was going to have a chance was if they trusted him to supply their need – all their needs as they journeyed.

One of the most powerful lessons wrapped in this text is that God's promise to supply all their needs was because he was present, **he was with them**. They already knew the cloud of presence in the day and pillar of fire at night were signs of God with them. They already knew they had been given bread and meat but now they were thirsty!



Moses is told how God chooses to respond. ^{on}5 The LORD answered Moses, "Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. 6 I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink."

That day they were delivered with the gift of physical water – but tucked into the middle of the daily provisioning is future provisioning of more than water. Wallace says it is signalled for us in the place name of the rock ‘Horeb’. ^{1*} “Horeb, is another name for Mt Sinai, the mountain on which Moses will receive the torah or Law from God. **BUT** the people will not reach Mt Sinai, or Horeb, in their travels for another chapter or more (Ex 19) so the reference to Horeb in 17:5 is *perplexing*.” ^{off}



Wallace says that this is telling us that, while the story is about physical (literal) thirst, there is another ‘thirst’ which will be quenched by the giving of the Law which is to come. It is another way of saying that the people do not live by bread (or water) alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord, ^{on} to paraphrase Deut 8:3 (cf. Matt 4:4; Lk 4:4). And that happens because the Lord is with them. ^{off}

There are at least three words of the Lord for us in this. 1. Of warning: in that the Lord must be with us, it’s not a case of having a magical staff that makes blood / water flow – it’s the presence of the Lord with us. 2. There is **hope** for us is that as we journey through life {wilderness’s included} our needs will be met because God is with us. 3. It is that we are to trust, radically trust the compassionate, providing of the Lord for our needs as we journey.

Turning to our Gospel text now, Jesus criticises the Chief Priests and Scribes because they do **not** ^{2*} **radically trust** John the Baptist and repent, and as Jesus by the time this parable was needing to be said – Jesus was understood as John’s successor – it means the chief Priests and scribes did not trust – radically trust Jesus either.



They – the Temple authorities and guardians of the institution were criticising both John and Jesus. Both John and Jesus were working outside the established – authoritative system, it is not that either was exactly blasphemous. ^{on} ^{2*} John “the Baptist” “was leading a renewal movement outside the “authority” of the Temple and his preaching was emptying Jerusalem. People were hearing the word of God fresh, alive, meaningfully and were queuing to be baptised for repentance (3:11). It was not *Christian* baptism as we understand it today, but rather as a cleansing and “turning” onto a new path, which is the true meaning of repentance (metanoia).”

John was doing ‘Temple business’ outside the Temple without authority... ^{off} and then, **then** Jesus arrived in Jerusalem and overturned the money changes tables and dove sellers stalls. This wasn’t so much a ^{2*} ‘cleansing’ as a challenging the financial base and the ruling families control of Temple business. Their demand is really: *Just who did he think he was???* A rural up-start! By whose authority does he do this???

Jesus response is fundamentally based on the Greek word *pisteuein*. It’s a verb form of our word ‘faith’. But faith isn’t a verb, so we usually translate it as ‘believe’. But as our understanding of how the Rational movement has influenced our language – believe is not strong enough / close enough anymore to capture the essence of *pisteuein* according to ^{2*} Petty. It is all about **trust** – radical trust – as in an orientation of one’s entire being. Jesus say’s the Chief Priests and Scribes had no trust in John – nor in Jesus so why bother answering their question about authority, they wouldn’t / didn’t believe him! ^{on}



Then in an amazing move Jesus turns to his crowd – and says – **what do you think???** Who is following the right path / God’s just path in living? Those who have ^{3*} disqualified themselves as unfit – not worthy, but when invited turn their lives around and say **“yes”**, going work in the kingdom’s vineyard. This group invitation is open to ‘all’ people, including prostitutes and tax collectors, OR those who claim to belong, to have authority, to be **the established** authority, already working in the ‘business’ – but aren’t following the right / just path of God and trusting radically for their daily needs – the Chief Priests and scribes. ^{off}

Moses, John and Jesus were leaders in a time of change – and it seems that when this happens everyone’s a critic. But to me, life is about change. Faith is about thriving **with it/ in it because** God is with us;

leading us in *right* and *just* ways that require our entire being turned in trust to our God-in Jesus within us as Spirit. Amen