

Third Sunday in Lent, Gospel Year A

Massah to Messiah

Psalm 95

Third Sunday in Lent

Analysis by Glenn L. Monson

*1 O come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!*

*2 Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!*

*3 For the LORD is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.*

*4 In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.*

*5 The sea is his, for he made it,
and the dry land, which his hands have formed.*

*6 O come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!*

*7 For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.*

0 that today you would listen to his voice!

*8 Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,*

*9 when your ancestors tested me,
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.*

*10 For forty years I loathed that generation
and said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray,
and they do not regard my ways."*

*11 Therefore in my anger I swore,
"They shall not enter my rest."*



DIAGNOSIS: At Massah and Meribah

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Prone to Whining and Unbelief

It is never a good thing when someone can point back to a place and time when (we realize now) we really blew it. But so it was with Massah and Meribah. Exodus 17 tells the story: the people of Israel quarreled with Moses and tested God because there was no water at Rephidim, the place of their encampment. And so for all time, the elders would say, "Remember Massah. Remember Meribah. Do not be like that." And yet here we are, like the Israelites, prone to whining when we encounter scarcity, and calling out God for what we perceive as God's failure to come through for us in our time of need.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Hearts are

Hardening

It is even worse when the patterns we develop can be associated with the people in history we loathe. Let's look at the poster children for hardened hearts: Pharaoh (of Red Sea infamy), the elders of Israel before its fall to the Assyrians (II Kings 17), and Zedekiah, the last king of Judah before Nebuchadnezzar plunders the sacred vessels, destroys the temple and the walls of Jerusalem, and takes Judah into exile in Babylon. (II Chron. 36). How is it that we can know the results of the stubbornness of others, and yet continue ourselves? As Jeremiah said, "The heart is deceitful above all things; who can understand it?"

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): No Eternal Rest

It is a terrible trajectory: Whining leads to quarreling, which leads to testing God, which leads to unbelief, which leads to more and more hardening of our hearts, and finally God says, "I loathe your ways! You do not regard my instructions; your hearts have wandered far from me. You shall not enter my resting place." Did we really think we wouldn't end up here? Did we not know what results when we presume upon God's patience? Did we really believe that God's anger would not break forth?

PROGNOSIS: HEALING: Messiah in the Wilderness

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): We Find Our Rest

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s not loathe us. Indeed, God cannot forget that “we are the people of God’s pasture and the sheep of God’s hand.” Yes, we have wandered, but God has sent One into the wilderness to us, and this One has become our Savior. Not our whining and testing of God, not our hardened hearts, not even our wandering away from God can keep God from searching us out. For it is true: “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” We had thought Christ came only for the virtuous, but it turns out that the opposite is true: Christ died for the lost, the wandering, the hardened, and even those who were dead in their sins. He has become our Messiah, and the wilderness has become the pasture of God’s sheep. God has provided our eternal rest.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Our Hearts are Turned to God

God’s steadfast love which has caused God to search us out, find us, and save us in our lostness has softened our hearts. No

longer are we the “stiff-necked people,” but we are those who know who is God and who is not. We look at the land, sky, and sea and we see God’s creation. We ponder the heights and depths of creation and we say, “Who are we mortals that God takes notice of us?” We are in awe of God’s creative, redemptive, and restorative love, and our hearts are renewed.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Prone to Praise

Instead of whining, we are found urging others to make a joyful noise to God. “O come, let us sing to the Lord,” we say. “Let us come into God’s presence with thanksgiving.” Our lives become a proclamation of praise. We stand firmly on the Rock of our Salvation, which is Jesus Christ, and our whole lives are filled with joy. We are found regularly in God’s temple singing God’s praises, for we who were lost have been found, we who gave no mercy have received mercy, we whose mouths were filled with bitterness have been given sweet water to drink and we cannot but bring praises to our God.