

# Third Sunday in Lent

## WATER TEST

Exodus 17:1-7

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Analysis by Michael Hoy

1From 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. 2The 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?' 3But 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?' 4So Moses cried out to the Lord, 'What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.' 5The 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. 6I 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. 7He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not?'

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## DIAGNOSIS: Testing the Waters

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *Quarreling*

The people of God quarreled in Israel, not unlike the people of

God today. They whined and complained, and to some degree there was some legitimate reason to their whine. But the nature of this complaint is ugly. Moses fears for his life, not before God but before the complainers (v. 4). Still, he brings their complaint to the ears of God. God is listening.

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Bitter Thirst***

What God will hear is the bitterness of their thirst. It is not simply that they are people in need. They are people who are bitter for having been delivered in the first place from Egypt, from the land of their bondage. They wanted to go back and drink from the river of bondage. They were faithless in journeying forward with God.

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Testing God***

“Is the Lord among us or not?” That is the question, the cynical question, that the people asked, in their quarrelling and striving-not only with Moses, but with God. That question really traipses into dangerous waters. They will, of course, get a positive answer to their question; but it may not be the kind of God with Whom they can live. Still, the legacy is cast in stone, on the rock named Massah (test) and Meribah (quarrel). Only the verdict remains.

## **PROGNOSIS: Watering Those Who Test**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Standing on the Rock of Water***

God, the Giver of all that is good, stands on the rock to pronounce his verdict. Moses will strike the rock with his rod. But the verdict of God is to produce the water that is given in graciousness, not in wrath. Grace prevails over critical judgment. This verdict is like that of Another-Jesus the Christ-who stood on the rock of Calvary. Taking the blow of our strife, he also gives us not what we really deserve for our testy spirits, but the water of eternal life (see John 4).

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) :** *Drinking the Gift*

God desires that the people drink, and drink fully. Water is given, and in this water is life. So from this rock, the people of God may drink not only to quench their thirsty, bitter throats, but quench the bitterness of their hearts. Drink, to your hearts' delight! When the heart is contented with the gift, then the spirit is changed from bitterness to sweet trust.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) :** *New Voice*

Now that water is on one's lips and filling the voice box, the words of quarrel are drowned out in favor of joyous acclamation. A new witness emerges from the lips of God's people. It is a witness that God delivers his people, and gives them to wells of water they could never have seen or experienced. Moses did this in the sight of the elders. See, O people, how good is the Lord! The Gift is given!