

Sunday, October 1, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church
Bible Study
“Quarreled & Tested”
Exodus 17:1-7 and Matthew 21:23-32

Open with a word of prayer

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, “What complaints do you hear most often in conversations with friends? What do you catch yourself complaining about lately?”

Exodus 17:1-7. Context. After complaining that they had no food in the wilderness where Moses had taken them, the Israelites turned to complaining that they had no water. Fair enough. Moses tries to turn their complaint back upon them, but the people aren’t buying. Moses appeals to God to protect him from the angry people, but God’s response is to meet their need. The event takes place “on the rock” at Horeb, also known as Sinai, God’s holy mountain. The story is in part an explanation of place names: ‘Massah’ derives from the same word as ‘quarreled’, and ‘Meribah’ from ‘tested’. But at a theological level, it becomes another example of Israel’s lack of faith in the God who has brought them out of slavery.

Matthew 21:23-32. Context. This week’s reading gives Matthew’s account of Jesus’ entry into the Temple for the last time. Those who will eventually seek his death challenge his authority. He answers their question with a question they will not answer, and then proceeds with a parable of two sons that contrasts those who do not claim to be obedient but repent with those who will claim to be obedient but aren’t – namely, Jesus’ accusers, the chief priests and elders of the people.

Read Exodus 17:1-7

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn’t make sense to you in the text?

Read Matthew 21:23-32

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn’t make sense to you in the text?

Read Exodus 17:1-7 again -

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

Read Matthew 21:23-32 again -

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

- Water is essential for life on earth. Thinking about that fact, does this change your view of the complaints of the Israelites in Exodus 17? How do you view their grumbling differently?
- In Exodus 17:4, we hear Moses crying out to God, *“What shall I do with the people? They are almost ready to stone me.”* Have you been in leadership and felt this way about people? How did you handle that? How is leadership in a church different from secular organizations?
- *“Do you know the amazing thing about the Exodus account? God gave them water. God showed Moses where to find the very thing that they were shouting about. God didn’t grumble back....”* What does this tell you about the nature of God? What does this tell you about the relationship between God and humanity?
- Matthew 21:28-32 contains a parable found only in the book of Matthew. Read these verses aloud in your group. How do you think this parable was received by the religious leaders of Jesus’ time? Read it aloud again, encouraging the group to imagine this parable being told in your community today. How would it be received in 2023?
- *“Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us”* (Psalm 78:1-3). So much emphasis is placed on *talking* about faith. Where do you see faithful *listening* happening? How can we hear the teachings and parables of our faith afresh and anew?

Closing Reflection Question

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

Patient and loving God, you hear our grumbling and complaining and love us anyway. Help us to be patient and loving with others. Give us the wisdom to join the overlooked and under-respected who are quietly working in this world for you. May we be found faithful in your vineyard. In Jesus' name, we pray, **Amen**.

And now we pray The Lord's Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power
and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.