**Exodus 17:1-7 (ESV)**

**1**  All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the Lord, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. **2**  Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” And Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?” **3** But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” **4** So Moses cried to the Lord, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” **5** And the Lord said to Moses, “Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. **6**  Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. **7** And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the Lord by saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?”

**“Striking The Rock For Salvation”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Part of the Lenten Season is to grasp how Lent is our life at the present time in this world. Plenty confuse God’s good order of salvation the way He gives it. They put Easter first then Lent. That cheapens the Gospel and it turns into the saying, “Let us eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die.” Baptism has given us a promise that our life of Lent looks to the blessed Easter we have in Jesus Christ. It comes to us on the Last Day. St. Paul describes it well, “Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings” Galatians 6:14.

Israel suffered slavery by Pharaoh, but God rescued them to be with Him in the wilderness. All suffer slavery by the devil, but God rescues us by baptism to be with Him. Our life of Lent now leads to wondering over such faithfulness from God in this world. What troubled His people of old is what stares us in the face today, “Is God among us or not?” Luther explains how this question discounts the promising gift of baptism, “For here the godless are not content with the Word; and unless God does what He promised at the time, in the place, and in the manner prescribed by themselves, they give up and do not believe. But to prescribe place, time, or manner to God is actually to tempt Him and to feel about, as it were, whether He is there.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Stricken by suffering we strike out, but God strikes back graciously to pour out life and salvation for us in Jesus Christ.

God’s people in the Old Testament were struck in the wilderness. They were free from slavery to Pharaoh, but still felt the suffering blows of life. It was not punishment for sin, but finally to show the hearts of His people that they could turn to Him for salvation. Of course, this is not the way anyone interpreted the situation. The heavy hand upon life had little comfort when traveling from here and there in the wilderness. They had tasted before bitter water, felt hunger with no food to eat, but camping at Rephidim posed a greater threat. There was no water to drink. The clock was ticking against life. There was no way to put a good spin on how things looked.

As God’s baptized people, we are struck with suffering in this world. Freed from the Devil’s clutches, does not mean this life is without suffering. Violent weather constantly threatens life and limb. Troubles bombard the work day one after another with little relief. Fear of sickness floats around seeking to take away good health. Suffering loss of those we love makes death seem impenetrable. Let alone, as Christians, persecution can push us into a corner that feels lonely and distant from others. Being struck by such suffering should turn out hearts back to God. Yet, life in this world grows weary before the darkness over what we see and experience.

When suffering from thirst fell upon God’s people, they reacted to the affliction. The answer was to lash out at God and His servant Moses. It came with quarreling and grumbling in all shades and stripes by all kinds of people. They demanded to have what was not there. God was put to the test. His faithfulness challenged to be merely a façade. His love to be cold and callous leaving them to be on their own. Even their questions did not seek answers from God’s prophet, but only to accuse him of failure. “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” This led Moses to also thirst for his own salvation. He cried out to God in fear of being stoned to death. Jesus later confirms this characteristic saying, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!” Matthew 23:37 Nothing pierced their stone cold hearts. No room was present for the promise God had already made for His people.

When suffering falls upon us, the most natural response is to lash out. It is like hitting your thumb with a hammer or burning your hand on a pot. Stricken by affliction makes us strike out and it shows our sinful nature. We are baptized with a new life in Christ, but the Old Adam is never far from us in life. Our Lutheran Fathers warn us, “The flesh distrusts God and trusts in temporal things; in trouble it looks to men for help; it even defies God’s will and runs away from afflictions that is ours to bear because of God’s command; and it doubts God’s mercy”(Tappert 130:169). Quarreling only causes the Devil to smile at such chaos among the baptized saints. Grumbling goes against recognizing the Lord’s presence for His people by Word and Sacrament. There is not much stone throwing, but verbal abuse and nitpicking can put to death pastors, church workers, volunteers, and any who serve in His Name. Like Israel, we strike out thirsting for deliverance.

God struck back at His people in the wilderness, but rather than snuffing out rebellion. He had compassion to strike back with love. He told Moses, “Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” God revealed His heart and it was not hard, but open to save. The staff that Moses used for the first plague in Egypt turning the Nile into blood brought forth water now from a rock. God was long-suffering and called back straying people by His promising Word. Of course, this place became a warning for future generations not to miss the mercy of God. As the Psalmist declares, “For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work” Psalms 95:7-9.

God strikes back at how we strike out on another rock. St. Paul reveals the true miracle out of that rock in the Old Testament. It was not the water, but trust in God’s saving Word for he says, “For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ” 1 Corinthians 10:4-5. The untouchable, impenetrable, and holy Son of God was struck by His Father in heaven. This is how deliverance pours forth from God for sinners. As an early church father notes, “When Christ was struck on the cross, he brought forth the fountains of the New Testament” (ACC). The rod that judged Egypt, split open that rock in the wilderness, now touched Jesus for a whole sinful world. Isaiah said it long ago, “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted” Isaiah 53:4. There is no complaint, no grumbling in His suffering of any sort. Only water and blood flow out from His pierced sides that show His love.

Stricken by suffering we strike out, but God strikes back graciously to pour out life and salvation in Jesus Christ. The water of baptism is an ever-flowing faithfulness for us daily. That old grumbling Adam is to die so the New Adam, the new man, has good words from Christ for others. The absolution answers rebellious accusations over life where the crucified Savior proclaims to the repentant, “I forgive you all your sins.” In this world, we thirst for deliverance and the Lord’s Supper proves God’s undying love is present. It flows to quench the thirsty with Christ Himself put into our lives. This is a love hidden in the cross when struck with shocking blows. It is hidden in the Church with bread, wine, and water that are shocking to see. It is hidden at last in the Word where God demands we give up on how we want deliverance. This is the foolishness of Lent, of our very lives as the baptized. It looks to the joy of Easter and finally the life of the world to come for all who have faith in Jesus. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.

1. Luther, M. (1999, c1960). *Vol. 9*: *Luther's works, vol. 9 : Lectures on Deuteronomy* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (Dt 6:20). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)