

October 1, 2023 CCC
"The Presence of God Among Us"
Focus verse: Exodus 17: 1-7

"I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb."

- I. *"Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing; rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight."* I Peter 2: 3,4
The person and character of Christ fulfilled these words even when he was thirsty and hungry in the wilderness. There is nothing exclusively feminine about a gentle and quiet spirit, which can be the character of a powerful man as well as a woman. This is the Spirit present with the Children of Israel, and which they were not ready to consider precious. Is this even possible for stressed, thirsty people?
- II. **The crossroads on which the journey of the Israelites turns.** Here, and in several similar passages (Ex 6:16, 9:22; Num 20:2-13, 27:14; Deut 32: 51, 33:8; Ezek 47: 19, 48:28; Ps 81:8, 95:8; Massah, Meribah, Meribath-Kadesh), the Israelites demand that God meet their needs as if God did not plan to do so, and even more crucially, question whether God is even with them. Soon, at the border of Canaan, all but two spies discount God's presence in the face of a powerful civilization. Instead of entering immediately, they wander for forty years. They don't cry out to God for help in their desperation, as Moses does. God is pushed away from their suffering.
- III. **Do you identify this morning with Moses and the elders, having seen the provision of God but unable to communicate it effectively to the whole community? Or do you identify with the bitterness and desperation of people who don't have hope?** When Jesus turns the water into wine at Cana, it is the servants who fetch the heavy barrels of water and see the miracle. (John 2:5-9) Here, it is the elders who are in the presence of God and also see the water gush out of the rock. Peter says that Jesus showed himself to "...not all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead." Jn 10:41
- IV. **How can we stop questioning whether God is among us or not?** (Ex 17:7) God chooses us and then we choose God. God doesn't change his mind. Monkey religion and Cat religion. About 800 years later, God tells the prophet Hosea to name his third child, "Not my people," because, God says, "...you are not my people and I am not your God." (Hos 1:8, Truly a lover's quarrel--God severely punishes but cannot in fact separate Himself from Israel or Judah) Matthew 28: 20b, "And remember," Jesus says as he ascends into Heaven after his resurrection and 50 days on earth, "I am with you always, to the end of the age."