**Is God Among us or Not? Based on Exodus 17:1-7**

**Prayer:**

“Lee, have you seen my keys?” (Lee is short for Lenore). I have looked everywhere and can’t find them. “Where did you last have them?” Lenore asks. “I looked there,” I say. “Check your pants pocket.” “I did I reply.” “Look in your jacket pockets.” “I did, they are not their either,” I offer in an exasperated voice.

And then I’m on the hunt. I check the bathroom, both bathrooms actually, nope. I look on my night table, nope (but I do see my hearing aid sitting there, I forgot to put that in). I check the counter in the kitchen. I go downstairs and check the office. Perhaps I left them by the computer. I’m pretty frustrated. I have a meeting at the church at 11 and it is 10:47 now. I’m going to be late. I hate being late.

I look in my bag, in all the slots and pockets, nope. For the love of …. what have I done with them? And then a thought comes to me. I walk outside to the car, open the car door, peak into the coffee cup holder and there they are. “Who put them there?” I say out loud to no one in particular. Good grief Ian, if you put things in the same place every time, you would know exactly where to get them.

I often do the same with my cell phone. One minute it is in my hand and the next it has vanished off the face of the earth. That is when it is really helpful to have two cell phones in the family. I go to get Lenore’s phone and call myself and follow the ring tone to see where I last left the darn thing. Of course, it, and the keys, have been right in front of my eyes all along.

Perhaps I should purchase one of those audible devices for your keys that rings when you whistle. Do they still make those? That might help. Or perhaps, I could just pay a little bit more attention to what I am doing. Focus, focus, focus. Put the phone and the keys in the same place each time. Pay more attention to what I am doing.

“Moses,” “what the heck man, what are you doing?” “We are in this God forsaken place with nothing to drink.” ***“Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?”***

The Israelites seem to have forgotten everything they have been through, everything that Moses, through God, has done for them. The history of their enslavement by Pharaoh is not in the long past. The crossing of the Red Sea where, by divine intervention, their pursuers were drowned, the time they were hungry without food or resource and bread rained down from heaven for them are recent memories. But they have forgotten. They are complaining again. There seems no end to it. No wonder Moses remarks, ***“What shall I do with this people?”***

It seems to me in the same way as I misplace my keys or cell phone, the refugees from Egypt have forgotten where they put their faith. God, Yahweh, has been with them through their slavery, on the path to their freedom and even now, in the wilderness. It has been obvious through Moses’ leadership but that recall has evaporated. Rather than criticize poor Moses, the people should be asking, where did we put our faith? Did we leave it somewhere? Did we lose it? The fact that they have been so very fortunate seems to escape their minds.

Symbolically Moses, through God’s hand, shows again that God is a present reality even when there are doubters. Moses takes his staff, goes to the rock of Horeb, and in front of the elders strikes the rock. Fresh water flows out and the people could drink. And then we hear this remark. ***“The Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?”***

Perhaps a glimmer of light shines into that moment. Perhaps a switch is turned on. It is not about water. It is not about the Red Sea, or manna from heaven. It is not about physical things. It is about a present help, a God who cares, a voice that speaks out from the darkness, a ray of hope in a broken world.

I don’t know if the elders at the scene understood the Holy Presence with them or if the people camped at Rephidim realized that the water provided was more than a miracle. Certainly their faith and trust in Yahweh would ebb and flow throughout their journey.

Questions arise for all of us and such faith tests are common. Where is God in our lives? Where is the Holy in our midst as we come and go about our normal routines? Does the source of love, compassion and healing reside around us always, or do we misplace it, like our keys, unable to gather strength, joy or assurance from it when we need it most?

How easy indeed it is to forget. Miracles abound;

**Picture**s of a seed among asphalt, picture of a baby, picture of prayer at a graveside, picture of someone receiving a meal, picture of waves.

I had a conversation with Creator God and said, Hi God, you have been there all along haven’t you, and I didn’t notice, I didn’t realize it. I wasn’t paying attention!

But you were there when I led my first worship service and I was shaking in my boots. You were there the other day when I was on the beach. The waves were breaking in hard against the shore. I heard you in the roar against the rocks and I felt you in the wind on my face. You were there those times when I visited Dad and he smiled, not really knowing who I was. You were there the other day when I helped a grieving mother lay her son to rest. I didn’t know it at the time, but you were there when we watched our girls go into surgery and you visited with us while we waited. You were there when I flipped over a brand-new truck on the Alaska Highway and all I could think about was what I going to tell my boss.

I have never been on the kind of journey that the Israelites embarked upon. Chances are that I would be pretty put out by Moses too. Chances are that I would ask him to prove that God was there. Show us Moses. Show us another miracle. Find us water in the desert. Find God for us Moses. Find God again.

The people seem to have forgotten that God has been, and is still with them on their journey.

The writers of Exodus demonstrate God’s benevolence once again, water gushes from a rock. Thirst will be quenched. Yahweh has not forgotten the people.

But Yahweh, God, The Creator, Love and Life’s source is never far away. The journeyers of long ago needed to learn to trust that. I suppose we do as well. We don’t need to witness water gushing from a split rock. We just need to look around us.

Finding God, being in the company of the Holy Presence is not like trying to find your lost keys or misplaced wallet. It is a given. If you are with someone at the moment just take a look into their eyes and you will know that to be true. If you are alone, look out the window and you will know that to be true. God is right in front of our eyes all the time. The Holy Presence is a constant companion as we walk through this life we live.

Thanks for listening this morning,

Amen