

## October 1, 2023: Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost

**Main Idea: Part of the promise God makes to us is to help us understand the promises God makes to us.**

For modern readers, it can be frustrating to listen to the laments of God's people in the wilderness. They have been freed from Egypt, they are being sent manna every day, they are being led to their own land and their leader is in direct communication with God. Why are they so quick to doubt what has been promised to them?

Because they have just emerged from generations of systematic oppression. There are countless studies that demonstrate that prolonged stress can rewire cells and reactions in our bodies. That means trauma gets passed down in our family lines. Considering how much God's people must have been carrying it's hard to imagine that they are relaxed or even thankful. They are shaken. Disoriented. Exhausted. And now, they are thirsty.

In a parallel vein, the religious leaders in this portion of Matthew 21 are carrying generations of knowledge about—and relationships with—God that have been interpreted through a specific lens based in behavior and rituals. These chief priests have never encountered a being who is all at once fully human and fully divine. They have never been called to the exact kind of repentance to which Jesus is calling them now—they couldn't have been.

In both of our texts today, God is coming face-to-face with a community that doesn't yet have the ears to listen to what God is saying. But that doesn't mean that God waters down God's message. That doesn't mean that God changes God's promise of grace or God's plans to deliver on that promise. It simply means that God plans to keep meeting God's people where they are and how they are, repeating the promise again and again until ears can start to hear it, until communities are equipped to embrace it, until it is a part of people's imagination.

Grace is a gift to us in and of itself, but it is also a process that leads us to the gift, itself.

### Scripture Summary

The chief priests and elders want to know: by whose authority does Jesus speak? Perhaps Jesus' authority rests on his belonging to God.



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*A man had two sons...*



# GOD'S WORD for Today

October 1, 2023  
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## First Reading: Exodus 17:1-7

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

## Psalm: Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16

## Second Reading: Philippians 2:1-13

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, <sup>2</sup>make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup>Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to

the interests of others. <sup>5</sup>Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, <sup>7</sup>but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, <sup>8</sup>he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup>Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup>so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup>and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. <sup>12</sup>Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; <sup>13</sup>for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

## Gospel: Matthew 21:23-32

<sup>23</sup>When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?” <sup>24</sup>Jesus said to them, “I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. <sup>25</sup>Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?” And they argued with one another, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ <sup>26</sup>But if we say, ‘Of human origin,’ we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet.” <sup>27</sup>So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And he said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

<sup>28</sup>“What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ <sup>29</sup>He answered, ‘I will not’; but later he changed his mind and went. <sup>30</sup>The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, ‘I go, sir’; but he did not go. <sup>31</sup>Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. <sup>32</sup>For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.