

## **“Is the Lord Among Us or Not?”**

by Brian Henderson • October 2, 2011

Text: Exodus 17:1-7

Today’s story out of the Hebrew Scriptures is probably a familiar one for us. Sensing this...and knowing that I’ve preached from this text before...I spent the better part of this week trying to figure out what to say again about this story today?

In some ways it tells the story of ancient people and it tells our story too.

But as I was thinking and reflecting this week I learned that today is Pulpit Freedom Sunday which was started by the Alliance Defense Fund whose founders include James Dobson. Pulpit Freedom Sunday encourages pastors around the country to be political in the pulpit.

Yes...you heard me right...the hope for today is that at least a thousand pastors around the country will speak out about any number of politically charged issues...and they’re these pastors are to suggest to their congregants how to vote in the upcoming elections.

Apparently the Alliance Defense Fund wants intentionally to upset the IRS so that the IRS will take it and the churches it represents to court. It’s a long story...

Suffice to say...I'm not going to lean politically in one direction or another today. Take a deep breath...the Senior Pastor of Calvary Baptist Church of Denver is not going to participate in Pulpit Freedom Sunday.

I continued thinking through our text for today and wondered how I'd approach it. Then...the mail arrived. Not always...but more times than I count...a thought for a sermon presents itself when I least expect it.

I received a hand-written letter from my youngest brother Kevin. It seems that my brother has had a conversion experience all over again. Twice now in the past month we've received hand-written notes from him. This is extraordinarily rare.

Maybe this is what happens when you go through boot camp. You see...my brother has joined the Coast Guard and apparently experienced what many of you I suspect have experienced when you joined one of the branches of the armed forces.

My brother Kevin wrote the following...

*Brian, I just got back from chapel here on post and it made me think of you. I attended the protestant service and the chaplain gave a good message. He reminded me a lot of you. His message was on Exodus 17:1-7 and I definitely related my experience here.*

*It is not easy getting yelled at by someone when they are in your face, or doing push ups and sit-ups laying in your own pool of sweat...and in my first week I struggled with this and doubted why I was here...*

*Then one night they had us standing in front of a wall and screaming, "Eyes on the boat!" till we basically had no voice left. Half-way into this pleasant exercise I had a thought and it made me smile on the inside (because you can't smile on the outside because you're made to do push-ups if you do...)*

*The thought that came to my mind was...I am standing here angry and complaining about yelling at a wall when my God suffered and died on a cross for me. The whole thing really opened my eyes...I don't let it get to me now and I stay positive. Whenever we're made to do anything now I just think to myself, "My God can move mountains...there is nothing these officers can throw at me that I cannot do..."*

In some ways...I suppose it can be said that the ancient Israelites found themselves in a boot-camp of sorts. They were freed from the Egyptians but then were left wandering in the wilderness.

And like good human beings...boy could they complain. Have you ever complained? Generally speaking...church folk never complain...never really...

I'm kidding...but let's not get down on ourselves...we're human beings just like the ancient Israelites and there's always *something* or *someone* to complain about...right? ☺ Let's just be honest...

Interestingly and it isn't to go without noticing...here in Exodus 17 we find that both the Israelites and Moses complaining...

At one level I think the crux of this story intends to remind us that when we're struggling in life...when we're trying to figure out our lives and the life of our families...when we're trying to navigate the realities that often confront us in overwhelming ways...whether we're in school...university...whether we're at the beginning of adulthood or nearing the later stations of life...

If we find ourselves complaining...if we're facing a rock or a wall in front of us that seems to make no sense...

The ancient folk who preserved for us this story of the Israelites want us along with our complaining...to remember Yahweh...to remember God...to remember what the Divine can and does do in life through us and with us and all around us.

Is the Lord among us or not? God sure is. I want to challenge us here at Calvary to remember God...to pray. To pray for each other. To pray for our congregation as we continue to take steps of faith. To pray for both big things and for small things. To pray being grateful for all that we have...even if what we have seems small or little...in truth it isn't.

I'm encouraged that through our strategic planning sessions so far prayer has been lifted up by several as something to which we ought to give more attention. This is good. When we pray we remember God...and when we remember God...we often remember what it means to be human...and when we remember what it means to be human...I believe we're empowered to be better followers of the very one who asked us to remember him...to remember Jesus...to remember the way of love with which he lived and modeled for us all.

Will you join me now as we turn to this table...to remember...to remember God...to remember Jesus...to remember the larger community of faith of which we're a part...and to remember...always...to love. Amen.