

**SUMMARY: COMPLAINT & MIRACLE***(Exodus 17:1-7)*

Our reading continues to follow the Israelites after their deliverance from Egypt. There are four observations that I would like to highlight from today's reading: two concern our God-given right and ability to complain, and two concern the nature and purpose of God's miracles.

There is room for our honest complaining – struggling/quarreling even... with God: 'Dear God!

*Are you with us or not? Have you ever asked that? ...those times when you've tried so hard to do the right thing but when things seemed to be going SO wrong? ...times when life seemed to be just SO unfair – when it makes no sense! I think of that couple who, after all their hard work and careful planning for retirement, receive that awful medical diagnosis and now instead of travelling and fun, it's all about treatments and angst! **Dear God – why?***

There are so many scriptures that pick up on this - where we see good folks wrestling with God as they face bad situations & circumstances. The Psalms are packed full of these gut-wrenched prayers that unashamedly express all sorts of struggle: **Psalm 10, Psalm 13, Psalm 22**. Or how about in Gn.32 where we read God actually honouring Jacob's wrestling<sup>i</sup>? *I think of those scenes in 'Fiddler on the Roof' where we see Tevye engaging God in this tussling way ...* **Clearly, there is room for us at times to argue back and forth, struggling with God...**

Our second observation from this text is how there is room for us also to be exasperated with one another. It seems that Our love for one another does not mean that we are always expected to like one another... As within any family, sometimes it's the liking that's REALLY difficult!

That's because sometimes it's we who are wrong and don't want to admit it, and sometimes it's because the other is wrong! But more important than working the illusion of always being in harmony - what I believe Our God wants most from us is our respectful honesty – ...and NEVER to be saying '**peace peace' where there is no peace!**' ...as Ezekiel<sup>ii</sup> warned! I think of what my friend Charmaine Johnson said all those years ago: '**I don't know if you are really my friend until we have had a good fight**'. And so - seeing Moses throwing his hands up at God in desperation - it seems that there really must be room in our spirituality for our venting to God: and expressing our occasional exasperation with one another...

And why? Because complaining exposes our frustration, which ultimately exposes our willingness to admit our vulnerability. I love how the word 'Complaint' is from Latin *plangere* meaning 'to strike' or 'to beat one's breast' – expressing desperation within our circumstances... God does not want our pretense at stoic self-sufficiency! God wants us to be real! Venting our complaints exposes that vulnerability: leaving room for God to step into that space we create – room for us to SEE how God is acting - **owning our vulnerability leaves room for our appreciation of the miraculous...**

That introduces our third observation – that as we are following Christ – there MUST always be room for us to be anticipating, to be *expecting* the miraculous! How would you define a miracle?

We may all have different ideas here, but, for me, a miracle is anywhere – able to be explained or not - where I am given to see God's hand at work! Where have I seen God's hand at work – where have you, not necessarily bringing water from a rock perhaps, but how about *bringing a child from a womb? Or bringing about reconciliation after some awful relationship breakdown?*

*Or in the renewed self-respect that may begin to come - recovering after a substance-abuse collapse? How about on Orange Shirt Day? Can we see God's hand in the sensitivity of us as a privileged people who are coming increasingly to own our role in the abuse & intended genocide of aboriginal people everywhere? Or how about in the rise of a communal social consciousness where previously there was just an obsession with self-preservation? Or even in the little things: perhaps in the sipping of your morning coffee/tea with the new day sun warm on your face...?*

And then there's this fourth observation: It seems that our participation in the miraculous work of God must at times place us in situations where we will need to seem naïve - be vulnerable! There must be room in our faith for situations where unless God shows up we will look very foolish! *You know how ridiculous Moses would have looked slamming away at that rock if nothing had happened?* Is that what Paul had in mind when he wrote<sup>iii</sup> about us needing to be as fools for Christ?

I'm not suggesting that God wants us to expect God to do everything while we just naively stand by; we MUST of course always do our best planning, preparation, our due diligence. But I do think that there is a point in our lives where, if we are truly to know God with us, we do have to be prepared to step aside **'to let go and let God!'** As the Psalmist writes in Ps 14 – God does want us to be God-ready/God-expectant...

And so, summing this up: This text suggests that it's OK for us sometimes to complain and be grumpy with God as well as to be kind of exasperated with one another! More than OK, it may even be necessary! *But having complained, the question changes from our wanting God **TO** show up, to our asking God to reveal to us how God **IS** showing up ...already here and busy within the people and circumstances of our lives!* Our complaining is given that we may clear the air, refocus, come to appreciate how God is even now at work putting things right. **The real miracle is when our complaining does that - moves us from unhelpfully and unfaithfully just whingeing to a place of quite wonderful perceiving.** The Troggs were quite correct in that *'Love (God) is all around us...'* or as the Psalmist<sup>iv</sup> sang: *'Where shall I go to be away from your presence...?'*

**'Open our eyes Dear God that we may see where you actually already are.** It's that seeing that mobilizes us to action: *'If God's got this, then it's OK for me to pick up my mat and get involved!'*

*What does that dry desert rock which Moses struck - and from which God allowed water miraculously to appear - represent for you? What apparently insurmountable obstacle to you living fully and freely into God's intentions for your life are you facing?*

**Please feel free to complain/vent your frustration to God at how that thing is hurting you!**  
*And then it's for us to ask ourselves how aware are we of how God is currently, actually, already addressing that obstacle?*

*How is God's most wonderfully life-giving water actually already flowing in our lives?  
How does God want to align us with God to become part of that flowing water, God's stream of healing in a land that is still so desperately thirsty...?*

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<sup>i</sup> Genesis 32:22-32

<sup>ii</sup> Ezekiel 13:10

<sup>iii</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:10

<sup>iv</sup> Psalm 139

<sup>v</sup> Referring to John 5:1-18. How Jesus was able to mobilise the previously idle paralytic.