

Service for Sept. 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

Greeting, Announcements

### **Call to Worship**

Presider: Where is God?

Voice #1: God is in the rock and the water.

**All: Loving God, be with us now and forever.**

Presider: Where is God?

Voice #2: God is in the darkness, and in the light.

**All: Loving God, be with us now and forever.**

Presider: Where is God?

Voice #3: God is in our living and in our dying.

**All: Loving God, be with us now and forever.**

Presider: Come, let us worship the God  
who is in us and all around us.

### **Prayer of Approach**

**Loving God, help us to be patient as we travel the road of life. Bring us to an awareness of your presence. Help us to trust you, and love you, and serve you. Amen**

Hymn: #415, Voices United,  
God We Praise You for the Morning

### **Prayer of Confession**

**God creates us to be whole and healthy people, to live our lives to the fullest, and to bring life to others. Sometimes we do things that are wrong, and feel badly about them. We feel like we are being torn apart. Sometimes we worry about things and get all tied up in knots. Sometimes we complain about everything, and get angry when things don't go the way we want... but when we say we're sorry, God forgives us and sets us**

**free...**

*Silent time for personal reflection.*

### **Words of Assurance**

God, who is ready to share all good things with us, responds to our acknowledgement of sin, with forgiveness. When we place our hope in God, we are not left destitute but are blessed with the pardon and possibilities for the life that we need. Praise be to God!

**Hymn:** #87, More Voices, Living Water

### **Conversation**

**Hymn:** Everything We Need \*\* (See note)

### **Scripture Readings**

Exodus 17:1-7

Psalms 78, p.792, Voices United

Philippians 2:1-13

Matthew 21:23-32

### **Reflection**

**Hymn:** #574, Voices United, Come Let Us Sing of a Wonderful Love

### **Prayers of the People**

Thank you, gracious God, for men and women who have the courage to work for reform – who challenge their society, their government and their church.

Thank you, God for women and men who have the inner fortitude to stand up for the unpopular cause, for the sake of justice, even if it means a personal loss.

Thank you, God for men and women who are truthful, who are honourable, who are kind – in short, those who illustrate in their lives what it means to be a person who follows Jesus, the Christ.

Holy One, we hold up to you our joys and concerns. We

give thanks for family and friends, for

\_\_\_\_\_  
Comfort those who are lonely and those who mourn  
\_\_\_\_\_; heal those who are ill in body,  
mind or spirit, \_\_\_\_\_ and strengthen those who work  
for justice...

This we pray in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray,  
saying, Our Father...

### **The Lord's Prayer**

### **Minute for Mission**

#### **Offering & Offertory Prayer**

#540, Voices United, Grant Us God the Grace

**As we present our offering to you, O God, we remember that it is the fact of our offering, rather than the amount that pleases you. Whether it be time or dollars, the gift is our commitment to your ministry, and our response to your goodness. Accept our gifts, we pray. Amen**

**Hymn: #595, Voices United, We Are Pilgrims**

#### **Commissioning**

Go and tell what you have heard and known:

**We will tell of the wonders God has worked in the past,  
and the wonderful ways God is with us now.**

Let us follow in Christ's footsteps:

**Let us use the humble attitude of Christ in our dealings with others this week.**

**Benediction: #429, Voices United,**

May the Blessing of God Be upon You

**\*\* Note -- Google:**

**Everything We Need (song) – Whole People of God**

## Reflection – September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011

The scripture readings for today share a common theme – an answer to the questions, “Is God with us?” and if so, then “Where do we find God?” The Israelites were asking, “Is God with us?” and the story suggests that God is found in acts of mercy. The Psalmist suggests in Psalm 78 that we know God is active in our lives through hindsight, by remembering all the times that God has been active in our history. Paul argues in Philippians that God is found in Christ. In Matthew 21, God is found with the people who respond to God.

The cry of the Israelites for water was a cry for survival. Very few of us, probably none, have ever been in danger of dying of thirst, or in danger of dying from starvation. Neither had these people ever been in danger of dying of thirst or starvation before they began this journey. Imagine what it might be like to be among a homeless group of people, including the elderly and the very young, following a leader through a desert with its hot, relentless sun and to run short of water. You head for a known oasis only to find that it is also dry. You can see nothing but dry, trackless wasteland all around. It is a serious situation and there seems to be no way out. Is it possible that we, too, might blame our leaders?

“Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?” was the angry question of the Israelites. Moses turns desperately to God, saying, “What shall I do with this people?”

Moses’ response in this moment is noteworthy. He does not shirk his responsibility. He doesn’t say, “What are you going to do, God?” Rather, he asks, “What am I to do?” He desperately looks for God’s guiding presence but he also acknowledges the necessity of his own cooperation. Something I’ve noticed in my own life is that the desperate prayer is the one that most often brings a clear answer from God. God leads Moses to water.

In the Sinai, there is very little rainfall or vegetation. When rain does come, it runs off the land in powerful torrents, the force of which digs pockets into the limestone rock. Water collects in the pockets and in time, as the water evaporates, calcium deposits seal off the water in the rock. Desert dwellers even today, know how to strike a certain rock formation in the right place to break loose the blockage and allow the water to gush forth.

It is a miracle that a rock can store water in that dry, thirsty desert! People did not invent this. It is God’s creation and it was God’s answer to Moses’ desperate prayer that led Moses to discover it. A heartfelt prayer in a very vulnerable moment – and there follows – proof that God is there.

From the beginning of Paul’s work in Philippi, there had been opposition and evidently opposition to the church was very active at the time Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians, for his

main theme is persistence in faith in the face of opposition and the threat of death. In chapter 2, Paul exhorts the faithful to live lives of humility, putting the community before self, thereby following the example of Christ Jesus. This is a familiar Pauline theme: community in Christ is built on the foundation of humility and the avoidance of self-serving behaviours. Using a hymn about Jesus as an example, Paul explains how to act in humility. Don't these lines paint a marvellous picture?

who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

“did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited but emptied himself.”

There are times when it seems that all of our society is bent on exploiting anything and everything and everyone they can. Imperialism exploited colonies, world banks exploit developing countries, northern countries exploit southern countries to support our consumer lifestyles... and so on and on it goes.

Instead of clutching and drawing power or possessions to himself, Jesus emptied himself -- to make room for God's presence.

There was a university professor who went searching for the meaning of life. After several years and many miles, she came to the hut of a particularly holy hermit and asked to be enlightened. The holy man invited his visitor into his humble dwelling and began to serve her tea. He filled the pilgrim's cup and then kept on pouring so that tea was soon dripping onto the floor. The professor watched the overflow until she could no longer restrain herself. “Stop! It is full. No more will go in.”

“Like this cup,” said the hermit, “you are full of your own opinions, preconceptions, and ideas. How can I teach you unless you first empty your cup?”

Paul reminds us that God is at work in each of us and that this presence empowers us to work out God's purposes in our world. The power of God working through us is very different from the kind of domination power most common in our world. God's power is made known through kindness, compassion and humility. The life and death of Jesus show us the power of vulnerability and the strength of letting go of concerns such as status and position. The good news of God's presence within, concerns the empowerment of all, not just a select few!

A traveler, dying of thirst in the desert came across an old pump. Attached to it was a can of water, and attached to the can was a note. It said: “There's lots of water in the well. Use this water to prime the pump.”

Consider the choice facing the person. The water inside the can is a sure thing. It's there right now

and it may be the difference between life and death.

However, drinking that water eliminates the possibility of getting more water from the well, for that traveler, or any other later traveler, because there won't be anything to prime the pump with. What if the note lies or something has changed? --- what if there is NOT water in the well? what if the pump doesn't work? what if there's not enough water to prime the pump? Would you risk it for the good of all?

In today's gospel reading, the chief priests and elders challenge Jesus and ask by what authority he acts and speaks. Jesus' personal authority, which clearly comes from within, makes them very nervous. As part of his response to them, Jesus tells the parable of the two sons. The first son is like the tax collectors and sinners who first refused to respond to the invitation to join the work of God's plan, but then changed their minds. The second son is like the chief priests and elders who claim to accept the invitation but then do not act upon it. They really think that they already have all the answers. Like the professor who visited the holy man, they need to empty themselves of the preconceptions and risk making room for some new thoughts. They really think that they already have the power, but if they had room for a new thought they could learn the power of vulnerability from Jesus.

Part of authentic faith comes in asking questions and in searching and even in complaining. Most of us spend at least some part of our lives truly thirsting, truly wondering where our hope is to be found and into what power our lives can be entrusted. The stories of God's food and water in the desert and the stories of Jesus are proofs of God's ability to do a new and life-giving thing in the midst of chaos, wilderness, death and change.

Another part of faith is willingly choosing to hope for water pouring from the rock -- to risk priming the pump, to risk letting go of our securities and emptying ourselves so that we can receive God, -- to risk letting go of our outward masks, admitting our mistakes and weaknesses and dealing with each other in truth and honesty.

Asking where God is and discerning where God is at work is a part of what faithful people do. God is surprising, often working in ways, and through people that we would not expect. We cannot assume to know where God is without continually asking ourselves where we see God in our lives and our communities now.

By questioning and searching, and by searching for God and discerning God's actions, we stay in close touch with God. Opening ourselves and risking allows God to act through us so that we truly become partners of God, -- so that we, too, may do a new thing.

## Conversation

I'm going to tell a story about Moses and the Hebrew people in the desert. I need all of you, children and the whole congregation, to help me with the story, so let's do some practising first.

Whenever I say the word "people", you say, "We wanna go back! We wanna go back!"

When I say, "hot desert", wipe forehead and say, "wheh!"

"hungry", groan as you rub your tummies

"thirst" or "thirsty", pant with tongues hanging out

"water", "Ahhhh! Cooool!"

Practise a few times.

Long ago, a great leader named Moses led the people (*response*) out of slavery in Egypt. It was a long journey through the hot desert (*response*). It was especially hard for Moses because the people (*response*) kept wanting to go back to Egypt every time they got hungry (*response*) in the hot desert (*response*).

But God told Moses to be patient with the people (*response*) and to assure them they would not go hungry (*response*) in the hot desert (*response*). Moses reminded the people (*response*) of God's promise to provide for them on the journey. At a place called Rephidum, God gave the people (*response*) special food called manna every day so they weren't hungry (*response*) anymore. But the people (*response*) didn't stay satisfied for long.

This time they got so thirsty (*response*) in the hot desert (*response*) that they threatened to throw stones at Moses! Angrily, the people (*response*) cried, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us with thirst (*response*)?"

Moses asked God, "What am I to do?"

God told Moses to strike a certain rock with a rod, and water (*response*) would come out. Moses trusted God and chose to do what God said. When he struck the rock, water (*response*) poured out and everyone drank water (*response*) on that day in the hot desert (*response*).

The people learned to have faith in God even when things weren't going so well. Moses chose to follow God even when things were really difficult.