



### **Year A Pentecost 18 Meribah grumbling**

I wonder why the South Australian Mallee people called their little town Meribah? West of Paruna ..

It's pretty marginal – it can be desolate.

We know about deserts – don't we. We live in the driest state on the driest continent on earth.

Did you know that one of the biggest problem in the outback, in the desert, is either too much water or not enough – flood or drought.

We know water is our number one need.

How would you like to go on a road trip, into the desert, set up camp and discover you have no water.

You turn to your famous leader, Moses, and complain – you complain bitterly. I guess you have every right to complain.

Moses promised a land flowing with milk and honey – so far there's nothing – not even water.

You blame Moses because he's the reason you're thirsty.

You blame Moses for his lack of leadership.

But remember in blaming Moses, you're blaming God.

Who was behind Moses and his stick which seemed to be able to do anything? It was God.

You know we celebrate Remembrance Day on the 11<sup>th</sup> of the 11<sup>th</sup>.

We remember the horrors of war.

We remember the sacrifice of 10's of thousands of men and women – killed in action.

We conclude the service with "Lest we forget".

If only that were true – if only we could not forget.

If only we could remember with absolute clarity the futility of war – maybe, just maybe – we would not go there again and again.

Since that first Remembrance Day there have been at least 31 wars declared.

"Lest we forget".

Dr Phil has a principle: “*past behaviour is the best indicator of future behaviour*”.

I think he’s right but we don’t seem to put his principle into practice.

Why didn’t God’s people simply remember the acts of God in the past to set their path for the future?

- He rescued them slavery in Egypt – with a “powerful an outstretched arm” – as the Israelite Creed says.
- Through Moses God brought on the plagues which weakened Paroah.
- God instituted the blood of the Lamb on the windowsills to protect the Israelites.
- God split the waters of the Red Sea – saving all the Israelites and drowning all the Egyptian army who were after them.

When God’s people saw this they sang from the Blue Altogether book:

*If I could stand I surely would,  
Stand on the rock where Moses stood,  
Pharaoh’s army got Drowned,  
O Mary don’t you weep.*

- Three days after that song they came to another camp in the desert called Marrah – meaning bitter water – they were thirsty and complained bitterly because they could not drink the water. God told Moses to throw a branch of a tree into the water and it became sweet. Next camp they complained there is no bread – so God provided bread from heaven – every day enough to be completely satisfied.
- Then they complained that there was no meat – so God provided masses of quails – they had more than they could eat.

“Lest we forget”!

If only they could remember the mighty acts of God in the past and be confident that he will do mighty acts in the future.

Now they are at a place with no water.

Lest we forget!

What did they do.

They complained – they accused Moses/God of bringing them out into the desert to die.

They throw their insults at Moses/God:

- “We were better off in slavery in Egypt”
- Why didn’t you put us to death back there at the red sea at least we wouldn’t have to suffer now” – Moses/God you have failed us again.

Lest we forget – God has saved them over and over.

One camp with no water – is not a problem for God – why don't they know that?

God told Moses to strike the rock and good sweet water gushed out – more than enough for everyone.

Why do we forget, “O God, our help in ages past – Our hope for years to come... (LH 556)

Why do we forget the very nature and plan of God: (Jeremiah 29:11)

*For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.*

I suppose it's all about me – If I am suffering right now well that must mean God has abandoned me.

Are we that simplistic?

Doesn't the history God saving Acts - Heilsgeschichte – mean anything to us. And if these saving acts in the desert mean nothing then what does Jesus on the cross mean?

In today's story Moses calls the place where the water gushed out of the rock Massah and Meribah.

Massah means doubting God.

Meribah means arguing with God.

Getting back to that first question? Why did those Mallee people call their town Meribah – Meribah means arguing with God.

According to Jeff Henschke's book they are all decent people at Meribah – Jeff's mum was born and bred there.

She was a Schubert – but also there's the Fielke's, and the Hampel's. Their not arguing people, well maybe the Hampel's are a bit, but on the whole they are good decent people.

I think the name of their Lutheran Church says it all: **Meribah Fountain of Living Waters Lutheran Church.**

They focused on how God provided the Israelites with an abundance of Water in the desert – not the grumbling.

And don't we know how the Mallee has opened up as they discovered the sweet water under the desert sand.

Peebinga – SA potato co-op growing potatoes in the desert – because of water.

Funny how now the desert river Highlands and the Mallee are the food bowl of south Australia.

This reminds me of the gospel – when we were grumbling and complaining God provided water.

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Rom 5

And the Gospel we hear every week, “On the night Jesus was betrayed he took bread...and he took wine and said this is my body this is my blood given for you – it given on the night he was betrayed.

At Meribah (in Israel) you have forgotten me, you have doubted my providence, you say you would rather be under Pharoah than with me – on this day I gave you living Waters.

When we are at our worst God gives us his best?

They say the condition for a miracle is impossibility.

How can the one true God be forgotten, doubted, and insulted, and yet provide living water so abundantly.

Grace is impossible in our eyes – to give abundantly to people who forget, and even despise you.

You know that the name Israel means to fight with God – with the intention of harming or killing.

Remember Jacob had a wrestle with God – it lasted all night – then he got renamed Israel.

Does this help?

God has saved and provided for his people from the beginning of time – will he stop now?

Doesn't this say in your time of trouble – God will provide.

How did Abraham take his only son Isaac to be sacrificed on the mountain so confidently?

He knew the acts of God in the past – he said, the Lord will provide – and on the mountain a ram lamb – was caught by its horns in the blackberries – the Lord provided.

Where God calls you to go – he will provide.

He will provide the words to say.

He will provide the words to pray.

Go have no fear.

Have no fear with people, have no fear in trouble, have no fear in sickness, have no fear in death.

Jesus first words in ministry were “fear not”.

Isaiah prophesied Jesus words to his hurting people: *Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

Your mate who is dying or crying – Say with confidence, “fear not” – but don't just leave it there.

We fear not because of the saving acts of God in the past since the beginning of time.

O God, our help in ages past – Our hope for years to come... (LH 556)

Amen.

*Help us to trust you Lord – at all times and in all places. You have revealed your love to us in many and various ways in the past and promise to do so in the future. Most of all you revealed you love and will by allowing your son Jesus to die for us on a cross of shame. Amen.*