

Sermon @ Bethesda United Methodist Church/Baltimore, Md.

27 September 2026

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: Exodus 17:1-7; Psalter (*Insert: Alternate leader/people*) Psalm 78 :1-4, 12-16 ; Philippians 2 :1-13 ; Matthew 21:23-32

We start with another vigorous report of the Israelites, scared and resentful. Complaining to Moses. Moses turning to God, and God patiently and promptly responding, this time telling Moses to strike a rock, and behold! water flows.

Then we have a psalm that repeats the story and calls it God's glorious way and tells us to remember and celebrate, praising God.

Next the scene switches dramatically to hundreds of years later, to Paul lecturing one of his supportive churches, telling them always to count on God to keep promises and show our gratitude by treating each other well, and implying they ought never to complain.

So far, good Sunday school lessons, every one of them.

Then the plot thickens and we're asked to remember how we got here in the first place. We see Jesus being challenged for credentials by the Jewish scholars and religious leaders.

"By what authority are you here, drawing crowds and teaching religion in the temple?"

You know the answer. If they didn't believe and support John the Baptist, why should he explain what he's doing?

It's all a prelude, a build-up, to Jesus' arrest and crucifixion as a troublemaker among the Israelites and a target for death by the standard method of the Romans: crucifixion.

Where do we go from here?

Let us pray. Dear God, thanks for making things so plain. You can agree the people of Israel were complainers. You can agree it took you a long time to rescue them after you'd rescued them in the first place from the **great drought**. We're

thick-headed about Jesus, too ... and the ordinary people of their day did better than we're doing about honoring and following him. Yet here we are, being heard, brought back alive again and again, acting like losing our lives is just losing, when we've good reason to suspect that the end of life will be marvelous and delightful beyond our imaginations, just because that's how you've set everything up, from the beginning, and right now you hold our hands and lead us onward and upward, and we can listen and live right and finish with a victory sign in our heads and hearts. Help us to work together along that line, as long as we have breath ... and thank you, Jesus. Amen.