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Sermon  
on 'For the Long Haul | **Quarreled and Tested**'

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**::: ZERO :::**

*"Grace to you and PEACE from God our Father  
and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

*1 Co 1:3. (NRSV)*

**::: Amen.**

**::: ONE :::**

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

There's a lot of bad air out there... I would say.  
A lot of quarrelling, a lot of discussion going  
on, and a lot of duplicity and falsehood.

No nice atmosphere for a good and pleasing  
conversation.

The Israelites in the wilderness, thirsting. They  
are really worried. And it looks like God let  
them down.

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So, they get on Moses questioning the whole enterprise of their voyage out of Egypt headed for the promised land.

They question Moses, they question the Lord. Quarrelling and testing. It is such a decisive part of their journey that Moses names the place literally ‘quarrelling and testing’ – ‘Mas-sah and Meribah’.

At the end and actually the centre of the passage stands an open question: *“Is the Lord among us or not?”*

## ::: TWO :::

We’re tuning out of Exodus and tune into the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 21.

We’re landing right in a scene which deals exactly with the same question: *“Is the Lord among us or not?”*

Yes, sure, the question is phrased in a much more distinctive and sophisticated way.

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*The chief priests and the elders of the people ask Jesus in regard to himself—as he had just entered the city in a triumphant entry:*

“By what authority are you doing these things?  
“And who gave you this authority?”

But actually, they also really want to know:  
*“In you, Jesus—is the Lord among us or not?”*

### ::: THREE :::

Obviously, this question cannot be answered easily. And what could Jesus have said that would have convinced them?

If you are not *ready* or *willing* to believe him, not ready or willing to believe *IN* him, there’s nothing to be done or said which could convince.

And it is so obvious, that the only answer to the question ,“*In you, Jesus—is the Lord among us or not?*”, they are willing to accept, is ‘*NO*’.

And it would have given them all they needed to get Jesus out of the way.

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Jesus, the one who rather worked and preached toward the repentance of prostitutes and tax collectors than to affirm their piety in obedience to the law.

So, we have tuned out of Massah and Meribah and tuned right into another scene of quarrelling and testing.

*“Is the Lord among us or not?”*

### **::: FOUR :::**

Now, Jesus is so clever in reflecting back to them how devious their question is.

He asks them if John the Baptist was on a *mission from God*.

Say they ‘no’—then why did they bother at him at all?

Say they ‘yes’—then the people around, the supporters of John would freak out make them jump in the lake.

So, better give no answer at all.

Yet, Jesus does not just simply let go.

He adds a story to the scene. A story of two sons which were asked by their father to go and work in the vineyard.

One comes out clearly saying, *“No, I won’t.”* But after a while he changed his mind and went.

The other one answers so sweet and nicely, *“Yes Sir, I will.”* And then... well showed his attitude of, *‘you can kiss...’*; uhm, *‘I do not care at all about your will, leave me alone’*.

Jesus unpacks once again the question of formal obedience to the law...

here: *“Honor your father and your mother...”* (Ex 20:12)

against his understanding of God’s will as the *better righteousness...*

*“For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”* (Mt 5:20).

### ∴ FIVE ∴

Jesus takes the question *“Is the Lord among us or not?”*,

wraps it up in this story of the two sons,  
turns it around and asks:

*“If the Lord is among you, what do you have to do?”*

And he also delivers the answer:

*“If the Lord is among you,  
you have to do his will!”*

Say no more!

Yes, sure, it would be just right, if the sons and daughters said, “Yes sir, yes ma’am, I will!”, and then did what they are called to.

Then things were just as they should be. And hopefully God’s children will learn to act just like this.

But first of all, *“If the Lord is among you, do his will!”*

### **::: SIX :::**

Now, let’s throw just a little glimpse back to the Israelites at Massah and Meribah—where there was *quarrelling and testing*.

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Moses is upset. The LORD understands that actually it is about him. And he hears the voices of the Israelites.

And basically, all they really want is water, because they are thirsty right to the bottom.

For them it is “Flasche leer” as Giovanni Trapatoni said, and also started raging... for those who still remember. And those who don’t google “Bayern, Flasche leer”. You’ll understand.

The Israelites quarrel because they fear to die of thirst. They need a life changing, lifesaving act of their God whom they trusted to lead them into freedom.

And despite all the *quarrelling and testing* at *Massah and Meribah* God acts, saves them, meets their desperate need—and let’s water flow from a rock.

*“If the Lord is among you, you will be saved!”*

## ::: SEVEN :::

Tuning back...

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Jesus says to the priests and the elders,

*„John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him”. (Mt 21:32)*

*“You may not have realized it, but the LORD was among you, and he saved them—them tax collectors and prostitutes,—them who thought they never ever would have a chance for repentance.*

*He saved them because you didn't think you needed it, you were not ready or willing to believe him,*

*and now you are not ready or willing to believe ME, not ready or willing to believe IN ME.”*

If you are ready and willing to believe Jesus word's, ready and willing to believe IN HIM, IN Jesus, he can, he will save your life.

He offers you repentance no matter what weight is on your heart, what shadow darkens your soul.

The one who can let water flow from a rock, will also save you.

*“Is the Lord among us or not?”*

Yes he is, and HE IS HERE TO SAVE YOU, QUENCH YOUR THIRST AND BRING YOU TO LIFE—FOR THE LONG HAUL.

::: Amen.