

Interactive lesson



picture from MMMS collection

I need a volunteer to come up?

Do you see the picture on the screen?

Can you copy it on this white board?

Can you show us how it looks?

OK, here is a tissue, please erase it.

Why did you not get all of that ink off the board?

You need to leave it ready for the next person to use! What are you waiting for?

Is it fair of me to expect you do something without providing what you need to do it?

Do you trust that I know what I am doing, having you use a permanent marker on my white board?

When God had Moses lead the Israelites into the desert, did they trust that Moses (or even God) knew what they were doing?

Did Moses bickering with the people help?

What did help?

So maybe I should not complain at my helper here when they cannot clean permanent ink off the board with just a tissue. Can anyone here explain how to get the permanent ink off this board?

When the Israelites felt lost and afraid, it did not help for Moses to bicker with them; Moses had to turn to God – then God provided for them through Moses. When I could not clean the new white board after writing on it in permanent ink and felt panicky, bickering would not have helped; I said a silent prayer to God for help, and there was someone who knew what to do to help me out.

Is else anyone willing to describe a time when they felt lost or afraid, and God had someone unexpected help them out?

So when things go awry (as they will), let us try to avoid bickering and quarreling, but rather ask God for help and see what path forward opens up.

Gospel lesson

This week's reading comes the day after Jesus rode into Jerusalem in triumph and then overturned the tables of the moneychangers. He and His disciples spent the night after all that excitement in nearby Bethany before returning to Jerusalem.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/jesus-taxes-caesar/>

Matthew 21:23-32

NRSV

²³ When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was

teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?"

²⁴ Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things.

²⁵ Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?'

²⁶ But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet."

²⁷ So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

²⁸ "What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.'

²⁹ He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went.

³⁰ The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go.

³¹ Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you.

³² For John came to you in the way of righteousness

and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "He Is Lord">

UMH #177>

Message: Quarreled & Tested



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/for-the-long-haul/eighteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/eighteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

God of endless patience and grace,
as we take time now to further consider today's
scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may learn to trust You more and to treat one another with Your loving patience. Amen.

We continue on "For the Long Haul," looking at how people "Quarreled and Tested."

"How do we deal with conflict in the church? Certainly not by pointing fingers and calling folks out during worship. But worship can be the place where we remember under whose authority we stand."

I rebooted my computer and a popup window I had not seen before appeared, welcoming me to Google Drive. I did not request or want that, but there was no button to close it, so muttering under my breath I tried using the taskbar icon to close it.

Up popped a “You haven’t finished sign-in” subwindow. My computer would not let me close the stupid Google Drive pop up window unless I clicked on its buttons.

This got me growling and muttering unpleasant things at Google, Microsoft, and my computer. With all the warnings about viruses and never clicking on links that did not come from a known source, being forced to click on something I did not ask for kind of infuriated me.

But the growling and muttering did not help. In fact, it caused the person who could help me to avoid the room where I was trying to work. Getting angry and bickering generally makes a situation worse, yet we do it all too often.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/wcy-numbers1/>

The Israelites escaping from Egypt were full of complaints. They complained about their oppressors, and God set them free; they complained about the army

after them, and God destroyed the army; they complained about no food, and God sent manna and quails for them to eat. At each step of the way, they yelled at Moses, and Moses told them it was all on God, and then God took care of them. In this way, the people were trained to have faith in God. You hear that faith outpoured in the psalm we read earlier.

In Exodus today, they were complaining about no water. You might wonder, what does it take for them to learn to have faith already? But it was as much a test of Moses as of God. You see, Moses had to lead the people, which meant having patience with them and remembering to ask God on their behalf every time.

In each successive miracle, Moses understood more fully that God was powerful and trustworthy. When Moses first approached the people, he did not expect them to trust. But now they were out of Egypt and kept coming to him as their link to the Almighty.

Moses got progressively more frustrated about the people getting panicky instead of showing faith like he had after God repeatedly provided for them. He may not have realized the people were looking to him as the source of power instead of just trusting God. And in this story, the people did not get water from just speaking with Moses; Moses had to speak with God about it.

Moses's bickering and quarreling with the people did not make the situation better, any more than my growling and muttering at my computer helped that situation. If you read about it in Numbers 20, Moses gets in trouble for chastising the people instead of simply letting them see God's glory in action.

We who seek to be like Jesus are called to a similar standard. The unchurched look to churchgoers to see how God moves in our lives, to see if there is any truth to this "Love one another" Jesus stuff. This was true of the early church, too.

Paul wrote to the Philippians, saying "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others...for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure." (Phil 2:3-4,13)



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/Lumo-authority/>

Jesus held the chief priests and elders of the people to the same standard. A major theme in the Gospel of Matthew is consistency of words and actions.

Especially in that book, Jesus lived what He preached, but encountered many priests, Pharisees,

and elders of the faith who sought personal prestige and fortune rather than living for the glory of God – and Jesus called out these [models for the people of Israel] on their hypocritical behavior.

Where do you fit in today's Gospel story? If you are the equivalent of a tax collector or prostitute, you are called to repent and turn your life over to God. If you are not one of "them," you also are called to repent and turn your life over to God, for all of us can do better, especially when stressed.

This week, if you get upset, I want you to take a step back, take a deep breath in and out, and pray – turn your stress over to God. Refocus on what Jesus taught and try to do as the Holy Spirit guides you.

Have patience, especially with others who are struggling. Rather than quarreling and testing one another, share the gifts God has provided, that all may have their needs met and praise God for it. After all, we are all in the world together.

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