

SERMON: "From Egypt to the Promised Land: How Long?"

Rev. Geoff Ross Sunday, November 1, 2020, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church.

[Hope you slept well!Extra hour:like 2020 needed another hour!Time seems strangely irrelevant:slow/sped up-where'd October go? Like COVID19:time is messing with us – has us asking HOW LONG?]

Have you ever felt like God had led you down a road only to find it was a dead end? Or, that God had forgotten you? Have you ever broken down/cried/doubted/asked God; "How long – must I endure this pain/sadness/loss/suffering/loneliness/shame – How long must this go on!?" We all have/I have – especially over the past 7 months. We've all been found ourselves in an emotional wilderness/spiritual desert/lost in a fog of doubt. Sure, we all want 'mountaintop experiences,' but life is largely lived at sea level – or worse: sometimes we find ourselves in rocky/barren/scary/desert wildernesses; lost/alone.

[In Bible:Desert/wilderness – places of danger/harm/vulnerability, of extremes: hot/freezing, dry/arid-no food/water, and of emotional/mental despair/frustration/fear/desperation – BUT, also growth. God with us in wilderness/wants to teach us things/there.Bible full of examples of God bringing people into these/seemingly God-forsaken places.]

The Psalm that we just heard praises God for His role in both creation and the history of the People of God – their salvation/freedom from slavery/and the fulfillment of God's covenant to Abraham(first reading) of a "Promised Land." But the Psalm also highlights the hardships experienced by the People of God as they journeyed from Egypt to the Promised Land – a prolong 40-year period of trails/testing/temptations, doubt/hardship/suffering, uncertainty/fear/despair, through the wilderness.

[“Via Maris”:Ancient trade route/Roman name: “way of the sea” – referred/twice(Isaiah 9:1/Matthew 4:15) – would've/should've been the preferred route – Waze/Google Maps/MapQuest/CoPilot GPS – plotted rest/pit-stops along the 700kms that should've/could've taken 14 days to walk. Yes;2 weeks! Not 40 years! God had other plans!]

The reason the Via Maris was the preferred route wasn't simply because it was the most direct route – it DIDN'T GO INTO/THROUGH THE ARABIAN/SINAI DESERTS (what's the difference between desert/dessert? Want 2nds of dessert:why go into/through 2 deserts?!) It was also the safest route: and they knew it. Almost as soon as they entered the desert, the People started to question/complain/doubt – ask "How Long?": Human nature, when faced with the unknown, to want to turn back/re-turn to what we know – even if it was bad. God knew the People were not ready to enter into the Promised Land – that they/we needed/need to be reminded of what Abraham/Sarah knew/understood; that they/we were/are to put their faith/hope/lives in God's promise to be-with us/protect-provide for us/guide us through whatever wilderness we're in.

[“Lion Hunt”-can’t go around/over/under:gotta go through! Didn’t get lost/God knew where they were-in “Wilderness School”/long enough to learn to rely/depend/obey/trust God.]

After 600 years of slavery, God wanted the People of God to relearn how to be faithful/to trust in God’s presence/promises. To help them overcome their past/doubt/fears God gave them laws to set them apart/draw them closer to Him. He/wilderness also gave them hard lessons meant to shape them/grow their faith/love in/of Him. God intentionally led them into the wilderness(Ex 12:37) because God knew that they didn’t trust Him/weren’t faithful/obedient, that we want to do things our own way/want things/it all:milk/honey – now. In the wilderness they/we are on God’s time, not ours.

[God knows what we want/need – God cares about those things but has bigger/better plans for us: in these uncertain times – do you trust what God is doing in/through what’s going on/you?]

As a Christian, life isn’t guaranteed to be easy/simple/pain-free, after all, faith is not based on what is seen/known/safe. Paul, at the beginning of a full review of historic Jewish Patriarchs/leaders - including both Abraham/Moses, states that *“faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”*(Heb 11:1) And its true. Especially in times like these. Trusting/having faith in God isn’t easy/simple/pain-free – but I’ve learned that God doesn’t waste your time: What we see as delay, God sees preparation; a waste of time/opportunity to grow. God is using this anxious time as an opportunity to stretch our faith in Him so that we might grow to know/trust in/rely on Him/become more faithful. Trust/faith/hope is not inherited; it’s learned/earned. We learn to trust God by going through what’s not seen/known/safe/easy/simple/pain-free – just as God did to/for us in/through Jesus’ coming to be with us?

[God’s wilderness-time:character development. Where the PoG were going not as important as who they were becoming! Shaping hearts takes time/hard work – takes stopping everything/starting over.]

Between every Egypt and the Promised Land there is a desert/wilderness: The only way is through it. Over the past 7 months I’ve struggled with what has been going on – I know that you have too – but no matter how hard this time in the wilderness has been, I know that God was with me/you/us. Maybe not in pillars of fire/dust but in friends/family/colleagues, in words of comfort/support/encouragement, and in the blessings of health/faith/strength for today and hope for tomorrow – of what will be the fulfillment of God’s promises. No matter where you find yourself today; know this: God is with you/closer to you than you know, hold/carrying/shaping/forming you. God is with you/me/us – and will be, for no matter how long it will take. Amen.