

**SERMON: "From Egypt to the Promised Land: Living in the Wilderness"**

Rev. Geoff Ross Sunday, November 15, 2020, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church.

*[LW: "Via Maris": Preferred route/"way of the sea" – referred/twice(Isaiah 9:1/Matthew 4:15)Coincidence? Both immediately precede the 'birth' prophecy of the Messiah "People who walked in darkness have seen a great light/lived in a land of deep darkness..."(Isaiah 9:2) "Walking"/PoG? In 'darkness' – disobedience-literally/Wilderness of Sin!(Ex 16:1); lost without God? Sounds like 2020 doesn't it?]*

Over the past 8 months – as we've been struggling with the uncertainty of the COVID pandemic – many of us have asked; *'When can we get back to normal?/back to the way things used to be?'* These aren't new questions. It's human nature, in times of great upheaval/doubt, to long for the comfort/security of the past – but, the truth is, those days are not coming back: 'Normal' is not a fixed thing – 'normal' isn't constant. Like the People of God living in the wilderness – these 8 months have not been easy/simple/pain-free: it's tempting to long for the past/yesterday/troubles-far away – no matter how bad it was. But this isn't what God wants us to do/be – the journey is the process to our growth/development – where we're going/not as important as who we're becoming according to God's plan for us/even in the wilderness!

*[Homesickness. noun: a feeling of longing/distress/anxiety for one's home during a period of absence/caused by sudden transition/separation – triggered by change/outside of comfort zone/way things used-to-be.Nostalgia:sentimental looking back/'better-days'/joy/peace/happiness – "God-shaped-hole"/residual memory of Eden/being-with-God... longing to go back/'got-to-get-back-to-the-Garden!'.]*

We all have them: Sepia-toned/softened memories – pain, suffering faded/hardship forgotten – that we hold on to/in a world where the present/future is uncertain. The past(good/bad) from the view of the anxious present, seems better and we're tempted to 'go back'. In fear/uncertain/anxious, the People of God voiced their desire to 'go back' – despite God's promises – crying; *"If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill [us] with hunger."* (Ex 16:3) But, was it better?

For over 600 years in Egypt, the People of God were slaves in the literal/physical sense and psychological/spiritual sense – they were conditioned/broken to trust/fear only in earthly/Egyptian power: they had forgotten God's promise to Abraham/became lost – they had fallen away from God. Despite this (reading) God responds: *"I have observed their misery/heard their cry; I know their sufferings."* I will save them/"*deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey...."* But, before God takes them to the Promised Land/milk/honey/hope/life they, first, had to go through the land in the middle – God's land – the desert/wilderness – time/place of pain/suffering/hardship – where they would learn to know/love/trust Him.

Walking/living in the desert/wilderness is a frightening thing – in the Bible/life it can be a place of peril; but in the Bible it can also be a place where we can profoundly experience

God's presence in/through His provision/providing what we need for today. I don't believe that God calls us into constraint/doesn't give us what we can't handle. Moses – in Deuteronomy – describes it saying God “*sustained [them] in a desert land, in a howling wilderness waste; He shielded [us/you/me], cared for [you/me/us], guarded [me/you/us] as the apple of His eye.*” (Deut 32:9) And, God's people were changed by living in the wilderness – they came to trust in God/gratitude for God's protection/provision/presence – and to know that God is sufficient!

*[sufficient: 'enough/satisfactory/adequate' but also 'ample/plenty/abundant.' it's enough – not too much, not too little, just right. Latin verb meaning "to meet the need." If something is **sufficient** it has met, or satisfied, a need. Interestingly:the usage of the word “Sufficient” has been rapidly declining since the end of WWI/rise of commercial/materialism – conditioned greed/never enough.]*

The message of all of this is clear: God has always been with us - even in the midst of our worst moments; and God still has a way forward for us as we live in the wilderness of this moment. Paul understood this/offers us an example of how to live in the wilderness. In his 2<sup>nd</sup> Letter to the Corinthians, he describes how, when he asked Jesus to relieve him of his suffering/the “thorn” in his flesh, Jesus responded/saying; “*My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.*” He goes on to say; “*So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.*” (2 Cor:8-10) This is what we can rely on: God in/through Jesus ‘dwells’ in us and, through Him/His presence, no matter what we are going through – pain/suffering/hardship/persecution/tragedies – His power/love/presence will make us glad/strong.

Friends, I don't know what your desert is, but I do know that God is there/with-you. I know that no matter what you're going through, God is teaching/guiding/shaping you/me/us into the people He wants us/me/you to be—people who know Him intimately/trust Him fully/obey Him faithfully. Know this:God loves you/will meet you where you need Him to be/will be-with you as you live in/journey through the wilderness. Amen.