

**SERMON: "From Egypt to the Promised Land: *Along the Way*"**

Rev. Geoff Ross Sunday, November 22, 2020, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church.

As Pam mentioned, over the past 8 months we have all been struggling with the uncertainty of the COVID pandemic – and many have asked; *"When will it end?"* And while this isn't a new question the truth is it's driven by our discomfort/not knowing what will happen next/lack of security. Uncertain, we balk/hold back/become doubtful – even to the point of questioning God/God's presence/promises/plans for us. Anxious as we journey through this COVID wilderness, we focus on our fears/worries – that we're lost/alone/abandoned – instead of God's presence/promises/plans for us. As we've heard, the Wilderness can be a dangerous place/play tricks on you/make you see things/doubt what you believe:but the Good News is, God is the Wilderness/with you/me/us as we journey along the way.

*[Reading:Paul/" let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us..." But "how long?" Have faith/trust in God/Jesus-pace ourselves "so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. " How're you doing with that?]*

A recent headline in the Globe&Mail suggested that ["COVID!\( is like running a marathon with no finish line;"](#) and, while I don't run(period), I think we would all agree. The solution to getting through this slow-motion race isn't running faster/anticipating the future beyond the ever-moving finish line/quitting; it's slowing down/pacing ourselves/staying in the moment. And this makes sense:Life is a journey – from past/future, birth/death – but lived in the present/inbetween-time. So, what are you doing with this moment? Are you 'living' in the moment? While the 'journey' changes us – we're not the same/when COVID19 started/not who we'll be when it's over – it's in the moment where/when the change is happening: but, as the article says, this is where the challenges go from logistical to motivational and, eventually, become existential/as the "mismatch between expectation/reality" kicks in/stings, causing doubt.

*[Story:God/Rabbi/boulder-God:promise to give you your desires-push boulder up hill to your house.Rabbi-faithful/obeyed-tried everyday/every way;boulder didn't move.prayed for strength/patience/skill-nothing. 1 Day/evil-one questioned him/whispered lies that other thought he was foolish/wasting time. Rabbi quit.Few days later/God comes back:Why have you given up? Rabbi:Haven't moved it/tired/waste of time/laughing stock...God: "Look at your arms/legs/back-stronger/stamina/taller/have you ever prayed more?How did that happen?/wasn't training you to move rocks/teaching you to move mountains.*

In the desert, God disciplined His people because they doubted/refused to continue the journey and to be His Holy People. As a result, the generation that had entered the desert died there – their experience became a warning/lesson. But there is another side to the desert journey. It was also THE time when God revealed His presence to the People of God/it was a time of daily miracles that demonstrated/testified to God's love/provision/protection of his People. Their journey in the wilderness would be recalled as one of fidelity/faithfulness/intimate solitude with God in which God patiently molded

them into the Holy Nation He desired. (Ex19:6/Deut8:2–5/15–18). This was the same discipline/struggle/endurance that Paul/(Pam) proclaimed Jesus (others:Abraham/Moses/etc) went through/(ran race) so that they would be ‘perfected’ in their faith – setting an example for us to trust in/follow.

*[Hymn: "Precious Lord"/through the storm/the night/lead me on to the light/take my hand/precious Lord, lead me home"-promise of be(ing)-with us/guide us/to go ahead and to "prepare a place for us"/"to take us to Himself". Hymn: "Lord Jesus, you shall be my song"/ "I fear in the dark/the doubt of my journey/but courage will come with the sound of your steps by my side."*

And, we can trust that He will walk with along the way! In our John reading, God/in Jesus tells us that "Do not let your hearts be troubled/I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you." And He did – and He is still with us. Although the exodus/journey from Egypt to the Promised Land occurred thousands of years ago, the example/lesson challenges/encourages us/today, as followers of Jesus. Their desert experiences shaped them to be the people God desired them to be. The truth is, despite our faith we will experience difficult ‘deserts’ that God will use to train us to depend on/trust in Him always. But rather than avoid/fear it, this time/desert/journey can be a transformative time/opportunity to grow to know God more intimately/faithfully along the way.

*[LW:Talked about CDN Churches/1918/Influenza pandemic-killed 50M/saw crisis as "opportunity."Paper:The Christian Guardian/Churches-N.Alberta:"the flu was not "an occasion for laziness" but was/instead "an opportunity for doing good, and the churches as organized bodies have proven themselves leaders in service." Churches closed, but worship/prayer, and service continued/found new ways to grow/stretch/be faithful-they found a way to live in the wilderness.]*

As we close out our brief series on how we can faithfully live in the time of COVID19, the truth is, the journey is what we make it – and the Good News is, God/Jesus are with us/you/me-here/now/wherever you are in/on your journey/along the way! Living in the wilderness/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/who God longs for you/us to be! But, friends, know/believe this:No matter where you find yourself today God is with you, and He has promised to guide you through/lead you to a place prepared for you. Amen.