

2007 February 24 Exodus 17:1-7

When we look at our Old Testament lesson we find Moses and the Israelites in the Wilderness of Sin. As far as I have been able to find out it's in the Sinai area and the Name "Sin" does not have anything to do with a relationship with God, it's just the geographical area near Mt. Sinai. However it would be true that if you were in sin, in a broken relationship from God, you would pretty much find yourself in the wilderness of life.

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God had freed the Israelites from Egypt through Moses. Now they were headed to the Promised Land, the land flowing with milk and honey, the land God had promised Abraham. God promised the land to Abraham, the promise continued through Isaac, then Jacob; whose name God changed to Israel. Israel you will remember means one who strives or struggles with God. In Hebrew the name Jacob means liar or cheat. So, God changed Jacobs name to Israel; changed the liar and cheat into one who strives with God.

Back to our reading. We find the ancestors of Israel, the children of Israel on their way to the Promised Land. They are go from slavery in Egypt through the wilderness, to the Promised Land. This wilderness was pretty much desert. They are thirsty they need water. They complain to Moses. They wanted water but the underlining question was "Is the Lord among us or not?" "Is the Lord among us or not?" They are strangers in a strange land, in the middle of the desert "Is the Lord among us or not?"

Her name was Triste. Her mother named her that because looking through the baby books, the English translation for Triste said it meant impulsive. That certainly fit, at least it fit her mother's behavior the bad men. When Triste looked up her name she didn't see the English translation instead she found the French meaning that fit her better. It said Triste meant Sad. Triste's life was sad. Triste had been a pretty young bright girl especially in High school. She caught the eye of one of the popular football players. Triste and Jacob, that's JACOB, had dated all through High school. She thought she knew him that's why she married him. Five years and five kids later she found out he really wasn't what he appeared to be. He was a liar and a cheat. It was the classic "I'm going out", "I'm going out for a video" and he never came back. There was never a sign of him, he never even tried to contact the kids. Upon investigation Triste found that Jacob was gone with most of his stuff, all of their savings as well. The pretty young girl who worked at the video store was also gone.

Triste is trying to make things work, trying to keep her family together. It's tough to find and keep a job when you've got 5 kids ages 5 and under. She is a faithful member of Last Lutheran Church. She has always been a Christian, always been a Lutheran. Now she is also wanderer. She is wandering in a wilderness, wandering and wondering where the rent money will come from. Wondering will the money for food will come from? She is also wondering "Is the Lord among us or not?"

There is a community in shock this week, due to the tragedy of the School Bus accident resulting in the death of elementary school kids. There was an ecumenical memorial service for the community. I would bet it was gigantic. People go to pay their respects. People go to show their support and love. But in these situations, people come with big heart wrenching questions. People die in Cottonwood, people die in car accidents but when young children die it starts them asking questions. "Is the Lord among us or not?" We cling to our faith but even as we cling we ask, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

You might not be facing the struggle of wandering for years in a wilderness, wondering where you are going to get water. You might not be a single mother of 5 trying to make it till tomorrow. You might not be facing a community tragedy but that doesn't mean that the question hasn't come to your mind. "Is the Lord among us or not?"

When we face the pain and suffering and hardship questions of life when we ask why doesn't God do something about all these problems or even the question of what life is all about, we might also ask: "Is the Lord among us or not?"

For some reason the Israelites couldn't get a direct flight from Egypt to the Promised Land. Transitions never seem to go from Mountain top to mountain top. We always have to go down into the valley, down into life and struggle. The Israelites were facing situations they had never faced before, never even imagined they would have to face. They had to learn to trust. To get to the Promised Land they had to learn to trust God.

I remember being on this building committee. We did a really great job figuring out exactly what we needed. It took a long time and a lot of work and a lot of money but it was all worth it. We ran into problems when we presented the project to the congregation. The committee thought the presentation was very good. We thought it spelled everything out. But it didn't make sense to the congregation. Some of them didn't even see the need to do anything at all. The problem was that the committee went on this journey, working and exploring the wants and needs of the congregation. But only the committee went on the journey. The congregation didn't go on that journey. The congregation and the committee weren't on the same page because the congregation didn't go on that journey. You needed to go on the journey to see it like we saw it.

During Lent we are on a journey. On our way to Easter, on our way to the resurrection and eternal life, on our way, we journey to the cross. We travel through that narrow gate that is more difficult than the broad one. The hope is that we will better appreciate Easter and the resurrection of the dead and what it means to our lives. Why there was ever any need for it in the first place.

During difficult times we might wonder. "Is the Lord among us or not?" We need to trust God.

When we ask that question, one place we can find the answer and be comforted is here. Look at all the people here we are together in this. We are here to remind each other that God is among us. But not just those of us here today, there are other members of Urland Lutheran Church. And not just Urland we are part of our SE Mn synod, we are part of our Elca. We are part of all the Christian brothers and sisters in the US and around the world. We all face that question at one time or another because life can be tough. That's why we gather together to hear his word of promise and sing his songs of hope and praise. To remind each other that God is among us.

We are going to sing a couple of songs that will remind us that the Lord is among us. At the end of the service we will sing, I want Jesus to walk with me. Great song. Great song to use when you need reassurance. Right now we are going to sing My Song is Love Unknown which not only answers the question: "Is the Lord among us or not?" It also reminds us of his sacrificial love for us.

Let us stand and sing in the Blue book page 661.