

## WELCOME 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2023 – 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost '23 A

Exodus 15:22 – 16:30

**Welcome!** It's great to be together again today! Word is Pastor John is recovering well & mostly behaving himself...we'll keep praying for Leonie. Eventually he'll be back but in the meantime... **Growing Praise** inserts are still there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & so you can share that w/ someone else.

**Zoom** Bible Study Catch-ups will be on hold until John gets back in front of his computer in about a month or so. But they will be back.

**As we move into this week...**

"It's not fair!" Whether you're 4 or 94...you know the feeling. You get "No" when you counted on "Yes." "Wait" when you need it "Now." Someone else acquires what you thought was yours by rights. And when you were told as a child "Life's not fair" that blessed well didn't help at all.

When life isn't going the way you hoped...pain lasts longer...hurt goes deeper...joy seems so far away...confusion more than clarity is the path you walk...being in the wilderness with the promise feels like you're off the map & your GPS is broken.

But it's in the wilderness with the promise also means you travel by grace in faith remembering **1<sup>st</sup>** that Grace isn't fair but more importantly the Promise **IS** grace in the wilderness & God's grace always provides: **The** Lord said to Moses, "Look, I'm going to rain down food from heaven for you. Each day the people can go out & pick up as much food as they need for that day. I will test them in this to see whether or not they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day they will gather food, & when they prepare it, there will be twice as much as usual."

We'll experience that grace & provision today...in whatever wilderness we find ourselves.

Let's pray...

## PRAYER OF THE DAY

*Father you call us as your own & release us into this world for your purposes. Let every thought word & deed be held firm in your grace. Make our worship today & our lives in all things a reflection of your mission to this world & the path ahead for this band of disciples one that invites others into your life & love. Amid challenges & changes equip us by your Spirit for whatever tasks you have set for us. Infuse your wisdom into our hearts so that we discern your will & way in all things for your glory & the widened embrace of your kingdom in this city...through Jesus we pray... Amen.*

*Let's sing...*

## 8 PENTECOST '23 A – A JOURNEY OF PROMISE: IN THE WILDERNESS WITH THE PROMISE

The Ladies Fellowship has been studying Exodus this year...partly to prep me (Pastor John) for this series & partly to prep them so that when we looked at this journey of God's people again, they'd have some insights to share...For instance... somewhere they would have heard a question like this one: **Given** the Israelites constant complaining & disobedience, if you were God, what would you be saying to them right now? Think about that for a minute...knowing what you know about God's people & their grizzling & moaning & unceasing thoughts of going back to be slaves... **"If** I were God I would..."

As adults, & mostly parents, most suggested a good spanking. Get their attention with a firm cuff behind the ears. Maybe a few boils on their backsides like the Egyptians had. We **ALL** leaned toward the "shake 'em 'til their teeth rattled" side of the scale. God however: **Then** the people complained & turned against Moses. "What are we going to drink?" they demanded. So Moses cried to the Lord for help, & the Lord showed him a piece of wood. Moses threw it into the water, & this made the water good to drink. Then...**After** leaving Marah, the Israelites travelled to the oasis of Elim, where they found twelve springs & seventy palm trees. They camped there beside the water. Clean water & then abundant water: not a boil to be seen & nary a smack in sight.

I find that disappointing...especially when I see what comes next: **Then** the whole community of Israel set out from Elim & journeyed into the wilderness of Sin, between Elim & Mount Sinai. They arrived there on the fifteenth day of the second month, one month after leaving the land of Egypt. There, too, the whole community of Israel complained about Moses & Aaron. "If only the Lord had killed us back in Egypt," they moaned. "There we sat around pots filled with meat & ate all the bread we wanted. But now you have brought us into this wilderness to starve us all to death." Just as we've seen before, those whom God has chosen as his own prized possession & freed from slavery with a mighty hand & outstretched arm complain & attribute malicious intention to God: *you've brought us out here to starve us all to death!* Now **I'm** thinking boils...but not God.

**Then** the Lord said to Moses, "Look, I'm going to rain down food from heaven for you. Each day the people can go out & pick up as much food as they need for that day. I will test them in this to see whether or not they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day they will gather food, & when they prepare it, there will be twice as much as usual." Maybe it's just me, but I'd be "raining down" fire & brimstone...I **know** God knows how to do that...but God **AGAIN** chooses to meet their complaints & rebellious attitudes with abundant grace. Food from heaven. As much as you need for today. **AND**...I'll grant twice as much on the 6<sup>th</sup> day so you can actually enjoy the Sabbath as I intended. My intention has always been to bless you not destroy you...Here...I'll show you again.

It's dazzling in its clarity. From the beginning, **literally** *the Beginning* in the Garden, God has provided **everything** necessary for our lives to flourish in his presence. At every step God calls us to trust his goodness & grace alone for everything & to allow his grace to constantly reorient our lives according to his purpose, plan, & promises. God has only ever sought for our lives to be fully rooted in him so that through us he could govern & bless & nourish all he has made with grace & love.

But when life isn't going the way you hoped...pain lasts longer...hurt goes deeper... joy seems so far away...confusion more than clarity is the path you walk... when you're in the wilderness with nothing but your frustrations & complaints...rather than a swift kick in the pants or a good case of boils or brimstone God responds with more grace...*"That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food & drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, & your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field & how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today & thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?"* – Mt 6:25-30

And in that grace...in the wilderness maybe with only the promise to cling to, God seeks to reground our hearts, lives, hopes, dreams, aspirations, attitudes & destiny in his way alone: *"You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbour' & hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil & the good, & he sends rain on the just & the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that."* – Mt 5:43-47 In the wilderness, we are to live the promise in the way of the Promisor... to act as *true children of (our) Father in heaven*. Mirror...reflect...live the promise into reality in someone else's life.

And even then...God of course isn't finished. Because in fact the Father's desire is, through the life, death, resurrection & rule of Jesus, to grant *"from his abundance... one gracious blessing after another."* – Jn 1:16...grace upon grace...grace piled on top of grace...*And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours from his glorious riches which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.* – Php 4:19... *God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will overflow in every good work.* – 2 Cor 9:8

We'll see throughout the narrative that the complaining & grumbling neither stopped nor did it stop God from acting in grace...*So the people of Israel ate manna for forty years until they arrived at the land where they would settle. They ate manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan. – Ex 16:35* 40 years of provision. 40 years of daily grace in abundance. 40 years where Nehemiah would reflect: *In your great mercy you did not abandon them to die in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud still led them forward by day, & the pillar of fire showed them the way through the night. You sent your good Spirit to instruct them, & you did not stop giving them manna from heaven or water for their thirst. For forty years you sustained them in the wilderness, & they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out, & their feet did not swell! – Neh 9:19-21*

It's in the wilderness with the promise that reminds us we travel by grace in faith remembering **1<sup>st</sup>** that Grace isn't fair...*When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. – Titus 3:4*...not one of us deserves that gift of salvation in Christ or the abundance we enjoy every day...but more importantly the Promise **IS** grace in the wilderness & God's grace always provides...as David proclaims: *"The Lord is my Shepherd. I have everything I need."*

**TAKE IT HOME** – As you leave today...be specific as you share with your neighbour

With whom will you share the grace God has provided you this week?

Let's pray with that in mind...

"Lord, do whatever you need to do **IN** us, so you can do whatever you want to do **THROUGH** us so that all whom we know in this city & beyond might be called into the embrace of your love, the fullness of your power & the joy of your purpose...through Jesus Christ...Amen.