

October 7, 2018

Exodus 17:1-7

1 Corinthians 10:1-6

Whining in the Wilderness

You'll quickly note reading through the Exodus account
How much the people complained.

Last week we saw them grumble when cornered
On the shores of the Red Sea:

Exodus 14:11 NIV Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?

After the miraculous parting of the Red Sea
Moses leads the people into the wilderness of Shur.

Again, three days into their journey
The people whine.

Mind you, three days
Following the miracle at the Red Sea.

The water seems to be too bitter to drink.

Moses turns to God.

God tells Moses to throw a log into the water
Sweetening the water enough to drink.

However, the whining doesn't stop.

In the beginning of chapter 16,
Six weeks into their journey
We find them again grouchy.

October 7, 2018

Exodus 17:1-7

1 Corinthians 10:1-6

Whining in the Wilderness

Exodus 16:3 NIV If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve the entire assembly to death.

Again, Moses turns to God.

The following morning heavenly manna falls from the sky.

Moses reminds the people

That just as God could be trusted

To save them from slavery . . .

To save them at the Red Sea

God can be trusted to see them through the wilderness.

But human nature is what human nature is!

They quickly forget God's guiding

~~

In our Scripture Lesson from Exodus 17

We see the people of Israel

Coming out from the Desert of Sin.

They set up camp at Rephidim.

But there was no water there.

Now any good Boy Scout would know

You don't set up camp

October 7, 2018

Exodus 17:1-7

1 Corinthians 10:1-6

Whining in the Wilderness

Particularly for over a million campers
Without ample water supply.

Perhaps this is God's way of testing their faith.

And what was their response?

No surprise here . . . They gripe.

***17:3 ESV Why did you bring us up out of Egypt
to kill us and our children and our livestock
with thirst?***

Moses, pulling his hair out, once more turns to God:

4 What am I to do with these people?

God instructs Moses to strike a rock with his staff
And fresh water comes gushing forth.

And now we know where the science of fracking comes
from.

~~

The Apostle Paul in our NT passage today

Reminds his listeners that God provided

For the Israelites as they journeyed in the
wilderness.

Paul says that even though God was with them

And provided for their daily needs

The people did evil by whining in the
wilderness.

Paul says there is a lesson here for all of us!

~~

October 7, 2018

Exodus 17:1-7

1 Corinthians 10:1-6

Whining in the Wilderness

Jeff Manion, in his book,

The Land Between: Finding God in Difficult Transitions

Uses the wilderness experience as a metaphor.

The wilderness is what we go through

In those difficult periods of life.

Our primary urge is to complain.

He writes: *Generally, you don't have to extend an invitation for complaint to show up. It arrives as an uninvited guest.*

You return home from yet another frustrating day to discover that complaint has moved into your guest room, unpacked its luggage, started a load of laundry, and is rooting through your fridge.

Even as you seek to dislodge complaint—as you move its bags to the curb and change the locks—it crawls back through the guest room window. Complaint resists eviction.

With every struggle, we become the Israelites murmuring in the desert. We miss the faith lessons. God desires to prepare us and build things into us, but we are hunkered down in our pattern of response.

The Israelites travel through the wilderness

Toward their new home in Canaan.

It should be an occasion to celebrate the wonders of God.

October 7, 2018

Exodus 17:1-7
1 Corinthians 10:1-6

Whining in the Wilderness

After 400 years of slavery
You'd think their gratefulness
Would last for more than three days!

They're experiencing a transitional period between

“The life that had been lived”
And “the life that will be lived”
If only one can get through the wilderness.

Have you been there?

When we are in this period
We long for the familiarity of the old life
Even though it was in bondage.

ANYTHING is better than the pain of transition.

~~

Isn't that why abused women stay with their husbands?

It is more difficult to change
Than it is to suffer through the abuse.

Another good example of this is the movie
Shawshack Redemption.

An old-timer who is released after years of incarceration
Hangs himself because he couldn't make the
transition
From prison to freedom.

~

The present circumstances become intolerable.

October 7, 2018

Exodus 17:1-7
1 Corinthians 10:1-6

Whining in the Wilderness

We can't go back
And it's too difficult to move forward.

And yet, in reality, the longer we complain
The longer we push back

The more twists and turns on the road
That leads out of the wilderness into the Promised
Land.

~~

The Exodus gives us insight
Into our own experiences in difficult transitions.

What difficult transitions are you in?

Caring for parents in declining health while raising
children?

They call that the sandwich generation.

How about the club sandwich generation?

That's when you care for aging parents
While caring for adult children
While helping to raise grandchildren.

Other transitions include . . .

- Loss of a loved one
- Health-related issues, you or someone you love
- Unemployment or between jobs

October 7, 2018

Exodus 17:1-7
1 Corinthians 10:1-6

Whining in the Wilderness

- Divorce
- Post-graduate uncertainty
- Retirement
- Empty-nest syndrome
- A major move

The list goes on.

Many of us are living in the wilderness.

All of us will journey there at some point.

From the familiar “what used to be”
In route through the stress--filled “what is now”
To the longed-for peace of “what will be.”
It’s easy to whine.

We can empathize with the Israelites.

When we’re going through it
It’s hard to recognize God’s presence.

It’s hard to see God at work,
Meeting our daily needs,
Giving hope, guidance, and encouragement.

We tend to learn nothing in the transition
Much like the Israelites
Who “whine” their way through the
wilderness.

We tend to doubt God’s goodness.

October 7, 2018

Exodus 17:1-7

1 Corinthians 10:1-6

Whining in the Wilderness

Transitional times will either build up or tear-down
A person's faith and spiritual stamina.

Manion: The wilderness where faith can thrive is the very desert where it can dry up and die if we are not watchful.

~~

But it's what we do in the wilderness
That produces the quality of character God seeks.

How we handle the difficult transitions
Some of which can take days, months, or even
years
Determines the trust levels we have in God.

We can kick out the uninvited guest, the whiner
By inviting another guest
To move in with us . . . trust.

When we choose to trust in the face of deep disappointment, complaint has less space to maneuver. While attempting to unpack for an extended stay, [complaint] discovers that trust has taken all the drawers in the guest room and already occupies the empty seat at the table. Trust evicts complaint. Trust and complaint are incompatible roommates. One inevitably pushes the other one out.

~~

God intended the wilderness experience
To transition the people of bondage
To the people of God.

October 7, 2018

Exodus 17:1-7

1 Corinthians 10:1-6

Whining in the Wilderness

For them it took forty years.

It was in the wilderness that God taught
The people of Israel
The lesson of trust and dependency.

It is a lesson for all of us.

So the next time you find yourself in the desert
I would advise 3 things:

~

First of all, beware of snakes!

When Jesus was in transition to fulfill his calling
He entered the wilderness for 40 days

There the Devil tempted Jesus.

The Tempter finds us most vulnerable in transition.

Beware of the serpent that first bit Eve.

~

Secondly, drink plenty of water!

Jesus is the Living Water
That keeps you hydrated during desert times.

Jesus refreshes the soul
As we trudge through the wilderness.

October 7, 2018

Exodus 17:1-7
1 Corinthians 10:1-6

Whining in the Wilderness

Carry enough water for the day

And drink deep from the wellspring of life in the evening.

~

Lastly, seek shelter.

Psalm 91:1 (NLT)

***¹ Those who live in the shelter of the Most High
will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty.***

~~

And in the final analysis

The most critical transition in our life
Will be the last one.

1 Corinthians 2:9 No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.

~~

In my previous pastorate

A member of the congregation and an ICU nurse
Told me this story:

She said that one night as she was working
Two patients were dying.

Their rooms were side-by-side.

One family was out of control!

They hollered and they screamed

At the nurses, at the doctors, at one another

October 7, 2018

Exodus 17:1-7
1 Corinthians 10:1-6

Whining in the Wilderness

To do something, anything
To prevent death.

In the next room,
The family was quietly surrounding the patient

Reading Scripture, singing familiar hymns
Holding the hands of the dying person
Speaking words of comfort and
encouragement

One room was absolute chaos.

The other room peace and tranquility.

Difficult transitions?

Of course.

The difference?

Trust!

Psalm 91:14-16 (CEV)

¹⁴ The Lord says,

***“If you love me
and truly know who I am,
I will rescue you
and keep you safe.***

***¹⁵ When you are in trouble,
call out to me.***

October 7, 2018

Exodus 17:1-7

1 Corinthians 10:1-6

Whining in the Wilderness

***I will answer and be there
to protect and honor you.***

***¹⁶ You will live a long life
and see my saving power.”***

Difficult transitions? We all have them.

Trust in the Lord

Beware of snakes

Drink plenty of living water,

And seek shelter in the Most High.