

"Five Helpful Hints for Traveling in The Wilderness"

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Preached February 24th, 2008
The Third Sunday in Lent
Cycle A of the CRL

Text: Exodus 17:1-7

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ²The people quarreled with Moses, and said, 'Give us water to drink.' Moses said to them, 'Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?' ³But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, 'Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?' ⁴So Moses cried out to the Lord, 'What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.' ⁵The Lord said to Moses, 'Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.' Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷He called the place Massah* and Meribah,* because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not?'

Sermon:

In the First Lesson the children of Israel are in the wilderness. They are out of water.

They are thirsting. They are afraid. They are anxious. "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" they ask. Note this: Not one single person has die from dehydration but they got everybody dead!

In this journey we call life, like the Hebrew children, there are those time we find ourselves in a wilderness. Often unexpected, unanticipated, unprepared we find ourselves traversing a terrain that is unfamiliar, uncharted, unfriendly, unwanted. As Christians when in there wilderness periods of our lives we know we shouldn't worry—but we do.

So why do we worry?

Worry comes to our heart because of what we have envisioned in our head. When we encounter uncertainty in our present our minds race ahead into the future. And we create an imaginary future. We fill that future with all the worse case scenarios we ever heard of...we can think of...we can recall. And then we combined them all together. No wonder we become unglued. We become overwhelmed. We have created in our minds a monstrous situation where we neither have the personal strength, the wisdom nor the where-with-all to overcome. We have created an imaginary future based on our fears. And think about that imaginary future – seldom, if ever, does that imaginary future include the Lord, our God. Jesus Christ is our greatest personal resource! Christ is the source of our strength, our wisdom, our where-with-all for surviving, and even thriving, while in the wilderness. Without Christ all scenarios are worse case scenarios. All the results are bad, aren't they? When tossed about in a storms of uncertainty you and I get this sinking feeling because we focus on the wrong objects the wrong thing. As Peter did, so we do. The wind, the waves become the objects of our attention, not Christ.

Helpful Hint #1

when traveling through wilderness:

Keep you eyes focused on your object of your faith, Christ Jesus,
not the object of your fears.

Amid the wilderness as Moses was about to head to Horeb the Lord God instructs Moses:

"...take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile,...."

Helpful Hint #2

when traveling through wilderness

Surround yourself with a cluster of supportive people.

"Take some of the elders" the Lord God says. In crisis surround yourself with supportive people who are emotionally healthy, spiritually mature. Note: the Lord God does not say to Moses: "take all the elders." Not every one is supportive. Not everyone is helpful. Not everyone has your best interest in mine.

What is the second thing the Lord God instructs Moses to do: "...take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile...." He was to take along with him an object that God used in his past to do the improbable, the unimaginable, the unpredictable and the unforeseen. So often, when life is going badly for us the prayers we offer up are: petition; intercession or complaint. What would happen if we, instead, offered up to God prayers of Adoration and Thanksgiving. What would happen if we offer up to God prayer after prayer that recalled and reflecting upon those past moments where we were uncertain YET God certainly acted in our behalf.

Helpful Hint #3
when traveling through wilderness:

Offer up five prayers of Adoration
for every one prayer of Petition.

You will carry into that scary, imagined future of yours the unfailing staff of past experiences of God's faithfulness and providence.

The Lord told Moses when he reach Horeb to "... strike the rock, and water will come out of it..." and what happened? Water gushed from that rock!

Helpful hint #4
when traveling through wilderness

The Lord will provide!
But that provision may be in a form we least expect it.

God regularly graces us in ways in which we don't anticipated it, never imagined it and/or least preferred it. The Hebrew children when in the wilderness expected water to come in the form of an oasis, rain shower or cistern -- not from a rock!

There is another important helpful hint that this text offers when traveling in the wilderness but we often over look it. How this account begin? The 1st verse reads: "From the wilderness of the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded." Note: they "journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded."

Helpful hint #5
when traveling through wilderness.

TRAVEL in inches, not miles.

One day at a time. One step a time. One inch at a time. Robert Schuler was fond of saying: "Inch by inch anything is a cinch" The wilderness is too vast, too endless, too scary to be traversed when we look at the horizon miles away. I can take it one inch at a time. I can take one step at a time.

So ...what are 5 helpful hints when traveling in the wilderness?

Helpful hint #1

Keep your eyes focused
on your object of your faith... not the object of your fears.

Helpful hint #2

Surround yourself with
a cluster of supportive people

Helpful hint #3

Offer up five Prayers of Adoration
for every one Prayer of Petition

Helpful hint #4

The Lord will provide but it may be in a form we least expect it

Helpful hint #5

TRAVEL in inches, not miles.

AMEN!