

## ***“Thankful in the Wilderness”***

Israel’s story is your story – and it’s quite the rollercoaster ride. They find themselves in the promised land – and then find themselves in the midst of a famine. They find themselves in Egypt, with food, and the Pharaoh’s favor – and then they find themselves enslaved by harsh taskmasters.

They wonder if they have been forgotten – but the Lord sends them a deliverer. They are released from their captivity – only to be pursued by Pharaoh’s army. They’re trapped at the Red Sea – and then a way is opened to them.

By water they are saved, walking through the sea on dry ground – and their enemies are destroyed by that same water – but then they find themselves in the wilderness, in a DRY and desolate place.

In the wilderness there is no food – but the Lord rains down bread from heaven. There is no water – but the Lord makes streams of water flow from the Rock. In the wilderness there are no markets to buy clothes or shoes – but their garments did not wear out.

The wilderness can be a lonely desolate place – easy to lose one’s way, to become lost, wandering in hopelessness. But the Lord their God was with them – guiding them by the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night.

Getting from point A to point B is the goal – but what will it take – what will that life be like? They knew they were strangers in Egypt – and the wilderness is a place to pass through, not a place to live forever. They knew their home was in the promised land. That’s where they should be – that’s their destination – but first, one must pass through the wilderness. Dearly beloved, Israel’s story is your story.

Israel is soon to enter into the promised land – but before they do – they Lord reminds them of what they have been through. “And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that He might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.

The time in the wilderness is a time of testing by the Lord – to see if you will keep His commandments by walking in His ways and by fearing Him. It is a time to see if you will “fear, love, and trust in God above all things.”

Israel had so much to be thankful for – for the gifts already given – and for the gifts promised, and yet to come. They had been delivered from slavery and captivity – and were looking forward to the promised land flowing with milk and honey.

If the Lord has given such great gifts in the past – with more to come – is there any reason to doubt that He will graciously provide all that is needed in the “in-between” – in the wilderness?

We confess that He has given us all we need to support this body and life. He promises that His grace is sufficient for you. Jesus says: “Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat and what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”

Israel’s story is our story. We are on that rollercoaster ride of life in the wilderness. We are currently living in that time between our deliverance from the slavery of sin and death through the water of Holy Baptism – and our entrance into the Promised Land of heaven.

And it’s not always an easy life. At times, it’s downright hard. And like Israel of old, we often find ourselves grumbling against the Lord – as if He doesn’t care about us, or has abandoned us.

Like Israel – who had the audacity to say that life was better back in Egypt, playing it up by suggesting they sat around pots of meat and had a cornucopia of cuisine to eat – we play down what the Lord has done for us, and covet something else – or someone else – and that is very dangerous!

To despise the Lord, to reject Him and His gifts – and to look for something else, something other, something better – is to put our eternal life in jeopardy. And that is why the Lord tests us – disciplines us as a father disciplines his son – so that you will keep the commandments of the Lord your God by walking in His ways and fearing Him – as you walk through the wilderness of this world.

Like Israel of old, look back at all the Lord has provided for you – behold what He has done for you. He has delivered you from sin, death and the power of the devil through the waters of Holy Baptism. He has provided you food and drink and clothes. He has been with you always, guiding you through this life.

In the mist of all this abundance the Lord has provided – we grumble and complain. Sure, there is bread from heaven, but it's the same old thing, day after day. Sure, the clothes don't wear out, but they're the same clothes, day after day.

We forget how good we have it – until we don't. When the Lord disciplines us – when He takes it away so that we realize again what it means to be in need – then we are reminded to look to Him for help – to appreciate even the crumbs from His table – learning how to be content, and giving thanks.

Dearly beloved, in these tough days of walking through the wilderness – the Lord is with you – defeating your enemies, providing for all your needs of body and soul, and leading you to the Promised Land of heaven.

And along the way, He sets His Table before you – giving you a foretaste of the heavenly feast to come. He decks you out with His garments of salvation. He reminds you that you are but a stranger here, and heaven is your home – but for now, and always – there is so much to be thankful for.

Come, let us confess our sins – receive His forgiveness – and give thanks and praise to the Lord our God, who is leading us to our heavenly home. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.