



ST. LUKE IN THE FIELDS
CELEBRATING 200 YEARS

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

GENESIS 17:1-7, 15-16

ROMANS 4:13-25

MARK 8:31-38

PSALM 22:22-30

A SERMON BY THE REV. ANDREW ANCONA
FEBRUARY 28, 2021

This week we celebrate the Second Sunday of Lent, as we continue in our pilgrimage towards Holy Week and ultimately prepare for the celebration of Jesus' Resurrection at Easter. This week, in the Second week of Lent we are driven further with Christ into a Spiritual wilderness.

As we continue this week into the season of Lent, I wonder how you are beginning to feel? Where do you find yourself in this new season? Do you feel excited? Anxious - perhaps in a good way? Or are you do you find yourself experiencing, fatigue, bewilderment, or maybe an overwhelming sense of monotony, as we continue to endure a season of pandemic, that continues to lead us not only into a spiritual wilderness, but a physical, social, and cultural one as well?

I wonder if you like me, sometimes find yourself feeling more and more like you are stuck in the desert, longing for more a substantial nourishment, for Body and soul, in a world that feels arid and incomplete without the life giving springs of abundant laughter, of robust and joyful singing, of presence and companionship in all that our shared life has to offer.

Beloved, here we are in the desert: we tread on carefully, perhaps recognizing that one wrong step, one wrong move - could be a disaster for us, and for those we love and care for. The desert teaches us about necessity, about what we need to survive, what we need to get through the great ordeal.

Here we are, continuing along in the desert, a dangerous and scary, and seemingly lonely place. I don't think it is a place many of us would choose to go, but we are here - and we are not alone.

Our scripture this week reminds us, that despite all of the things that make the desert a dangerous, exhausting, and lonely place, the desert is also a place of new beginnings, a place of new life - a place of promise. The desert is a place of covenant, where we can begin to know God more deeply, and know ourselves as beloved members of God's people, held by God's love and mercy.

Our First lesson today, from the Book of Genesis, reminds us that God met Abram in the desert, that God made a covenant - a promise - in the desert, with Abram and Sarai. Looking with favor upon them, God granted them the promise of new life, when all

signs of life appeared to be gone. God granted them the promise of his love, a promise of hope when hope was lost, a promise faith when faith had gone.

In the desert we are reminded that the loving kindness of God is transformative. Like the refreshment of an oasis, it changes everything, and when we seek after it and allow it into our hearts, it will change our lives, the lives of those around us. The loving-kindness of God changes the whole world.

On the personal level, Abram and Sarai become Abraham and Sarah. God gives them new names, new purpose, a new start. On the scale of community, they will not only be the new start of many nations, but also the new beginning of the particular life and story of God, a particular movement - aimed at carrying out justice, holiness, and peace lived out in God's chosen people: Israel.

And yet we know that what is to come for God's chosen people, in the grand scheme of things isn't easy. They are enslaved, invaded, dispersed. They wander in the desert, wrestle in the desert, go to war

in the desert: the people of God, are people of the desert. And yet we know what hope comes forth from the desert, the voice which cries - Prepare! The Lord is near!

Yes, the Lord is near, because the Lord is here in the desert, and come to us when we are there also. Here in the desert begins: Good News.

In the desert, we are reminded, that even if what we see is loneliness, frailty, and death, by the grace of God: we are not alone, but accompanied by the cloud of witnesses - whose numbers we cannot count! We are not weak - but made strong through faith, and we are not trapped by death - but given everlasting life through God in Jesus Christ.

The desert can be dangerous and exhausting, yes, but it can also be the start of something new, something exciting, and something hopeful. The desert hold its own way of life: wilderness and desolation, punctuated by signs of beauty, and signs of abundance. And the thing about the desert is, that it does not go on forever!

We too may wander here for a while, but we know that God is with us, guiding us every step of the way. God will get us through, with the gifts of grace, of love, of hope in community, all of which can be found right here, in our own little oasis of God: of beauty, of abundance.

If we persevere in faith, we will eventually come to the ground on the other side.

When we get there, we will know who and whose we are: God's beloved in a place that is also longing for a share in the same transformative, sustaining, and life-giving power of God's love, mercy, and promise which we have known in the desert.

When we get there, we must remember that our place - this place - will be ready for working, ready for loving, and ready for transformation. When we get there, we must remember to keep on feeding as we have been fed, to keep giving, as we have been given to, to walk together, and to welcome, as we have been walked with and welcomed, to know and love God - as God knows and loves each and every one of us.

Beloved, we're not there yet. So perhaps this week we might get comfortable in the desert, maybe even wandering a little deeper, trusting that we are not alone here in this place.

I wonder - what will you find? How will God become known to you? And what kind of transformations, what kind of new beginnings, what kind of discipleship, might God be calling you to in the desert, and beyond? What covenant is before you, what signs of God's promise do you see, as a reminder of the everlasting love, mercy, and promise of God: who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

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