

## On A Roll With God - It's Not That Hard

Exodus 16:1-7

First in a Series

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### Intro:

Does anyone actually like the feeling of being lost? I know I don't like the feeling you get when traveling and you take a wrong turn or have to make a detour and you end up somewhere you shouldn't and not sure how to get back no matter how many reroutes Siri gives you. Or the feeling you get when visiting someplace new and you get turned around or misread the directions and find yourself surrounded by unfamiliar buildings, unknown street names, and the faces of strangers. Then there is getting lost in the woods or in the mountains. It happens every year, people go off on an adventure, get turned around, take the wrong split at a trail, aren't prepared, or can't read a map, and end up on the wrong side of the pass, exposed on a mountain side, or never arrive at their pick up site.

There is a moment when you are lost in which you feel the panic in your gut begin to rise up against the rational voice in your head. In that moment, a hundred things can go through your mind and heart. It is a moment you have to fight to stay in control of your emotions and your imagination. It is a moment you have to work through the fear, anger, questions, and frustrations, and work toward finding your next best step.

This morning, I invite you to consider, what if the wilderness is not trees and rocks, or mountains and rivers? What if it is not an unfamiliar neighborhood or a strange city. What if it is a wilderness of another kind? The kind you can't always

see or define or wrap your mind around. Are the feelings the same? What can we learn from a wilderness we cannot name?

Prayer - As we walk our own wilderness moments or in the wilderness of our world, draw us near, open our eyes to your provision and grace, and may we have the courage to respond.

### Message

The people of God have been walking in the wilderness, both on and off course for hundreds, even thousands of years. Yet it seems every time it happens they (and we) forget what they learned from the last time and instead they feel like it's the first time. In those moments all the questions, uncertainties, frustrations, doubts, divisions, opinions, blame, confusion, mistrust, and fear take charge.

When I look at our world today, I wonder if we, as a society, aren't a bit lost and trying to find our way. I wonder if the last two years haven't thrown us off course and into a kind of personal, social, cultural, or even global wilderness. Professionals agree that the last two years only exacerbated underlying issues in our society and our world. Many believe the pandemic shook an already faulty foundation exposing long-hidden cracks and weak spots within systems of government, healthcare, education, and religious institutions. Emotions have been raw and all over the map. Politics heated. Conflict elevated. And even on local levels and in the homes of our neighbors, stress has been heightened, finances stretched even farther than before, and all the struggle, neglect, abuse, and tension that comes with such circumstances has only increased. From within this wilderness, all of us, at one level or another, have felt the fall out and results of change, fatigue, controversy, conflict, transition, frustration, and anger.

It is safe to say that many people today feel lost. And if they don't feel lost, they feel our government or our country, in general, is lost. And if they don't feel our government or our country is lost, they feel like *something* has been lost; something they might not be able to name or define or even recognize but something they know is gone.

I wonder what it is. I wonder how you have experienced such wilderness? I wonder what any of this means for our understanding of church and who we are as people of God. Whatever it is, the thoughts and feelings are real and can be overwhelming and exhausting. They are irritating and annoying. Frustrating and demanding. Whether you are lost in a kind of social or cultural wilderness or you feel you have lost a portion of yourself, your life, or your understanding of the chaos around you, we pray that all of us can find a way.

Beginning today, we are going to let the children help us remember our way through the wilderness and the key to finding that way. Using the stories from this year's Vacation Bible School curriculum, we will spend the next three weeks experiencing the "Food Truck Party" as it takes us "on a roll with God." (SLIDE)

Before you cross your arms, heave a big sigh, or roll your eyes thinking "VBS stories, really Pastor?! Children's stories?" Remember dear church, the Kingdom of God belongs to those who come like little children.

We will remember the faithfulness of God in times of trial and tribulation. We will remember God's abundance when all we see is scarcity. We will remember God's provision when all we feel is absence. Using both the Old and the

New Testament, we will find ourselves in the lives and stories of long ago as if it were today.

We begin in Exodus, where the people of God learned their greatest lesson about being lost and God's provision. Read Text: Exodus 16:1-7

Following the escape from Egypt and the Rule of Pharaoh, the Israelites lived in the wilderness for forty years. Led by Moses they tried to understand what God was up to, how their existence and experience in the wilderness was a part of God's plan, and how they were going to not only survive but be delivered and restored.

How long was it before you were over the lock down? Over the sense of covid uncertainty? The media coverage, and the bickering about masks? It took about 2 months, according to the text we just read, before doubt crept in and took hold and the people of Israel were over it. Two months in and they started to complain and question Moses. They blamed Moses for what happened, for the situation they were in, and the troubles they were enduring but in reality, it was God they were upset with. It was God they were questioning. They, like us, just wanted someone to blame.

They were mad. They were probably tired and hungry and every parent knows that when the children are "hangry" everything is harder. They were confused; things weren't what they expected them to be and things certainly weren't going the way they thought they would go. There was tension. There was mistrust. There were a lot of assumptions and a lot of questions. People wanted answers.

Remind you of any current situations?

Here is the thing about this wilderness experience and every wilderness experience the people of God encountered, then and now. A wilderness experience is a time of transition - a time of existing in between something and something else.

The Israelites were between a life of bondage and a life of freedom. Between despair and hope. Between what was known and what was unknown. Between a secure existence even though it was slave labor and persecution at the hand of Pharaoh, and an apparent insecure existence at the hand of God. They were between doubt and trust. Fear and courage. There is but one thing the people of God had to do and they simply could not do it. Trust. TRUST.

The people of God, then and now, are faced with the question and task of whether or not they would trust God in the midst of their wilderness; in the midst of the struggle and discomfort that comes with navigating the in between.

You might be tired of hearing it, but things are not going to be the same. We can't go back to pre-covid, to how things used to be. At least not fully. Life is not going to return to normal and I am not even sure we know what a "new normal" looks or feels like yet because we are still emerging from a wilderness experience. People are different. Expectations are different. Perspectives have shifted. Priorities have changed.

This day (and every day) demands that those who follow Jesus trust him; trust God. The question to ask is not what are we doing or what's going to happen?

It is not where do we go from here? Or how long is it going to take? The question to ask and keep asking is, “What is God up to and how are we a part of it?”

- What is God up to when more innocent lives are lost and how are we a part of it?.
- What is God up to when people can't be who they are and how are we a part of it?
- What is God up to when war is the answer and how are we a part of it?
- What is God up to when its easier to cancel eachother out and how are we a part of it?
- What is God up to when leaders fail and get away with it and how are we a part of it?
- What is God up to...and how are we a part of it?

When we have the courage to ask this question, we begin to let go of our plans and assumptions and become more aware of what God is revealing to us in the midst. When we find the discipline to ask this question, we learn to surrender our expectations and demands and look for what God is bringing about in our midst. When we have the endurance to ask the question “what is God up to and how are we a part of it” we begin to see the wilderness as an opportunity, not as punishment, failure, or separation from God. Our eyes are more open to see God's presence and restoration in action. To see God's healing unfold. To see God's provision, promise, and our potential in God come alive.

There is not a person here who has not walked, crawled, limped, cried, or climbed through some kind of wilderness experience:

- The wilderness of self - trying to figure out who we are, what we want, what do we believe in or stand for? Caught between who we are and who we are becoming or who we thought we were and who we truly are.
- The wilderness of faith - where is God, who is God - where do I fit in God's greater plan? Between doubt and certainty.
- The wilderness of pain and illness - how long O Lord, how long? Why? Struggling between brokenness and wholeness.
- The wilderness of new beginnings - starting over / new, finding your way, standing on your own two feet - between learning to walk and learning to fly.
- The wilderness of grief...
- The wilderness of change...
- The wilderness of divorce, unemployment, addiction, mental health...

As hard as it is, as frightening as it is, as uncertain as it feels, no matter the wilderness, the question remains, "what is God up to and how are we a part of it?"

In today's text, we read how God provided the mana, the bread, in the wilderness but the people had a responsibility and instructions to pick it up - to accept it, to use it, to allow it to sustain them. To trust what they were given and that it was enough. God provided quail but the people had a responsibility and instructions to prepare and cook it, to use it for good and not abuse it or overuse it, but to trust what they were given and that it was adequate.

People of God, hear the good news: when we are lost in the wilderness God provides. When we are lost in the chaos of our world, God sustains. When we are just plain lost, God knows right where we are.

Can you trust such good news? Dear God, may it be so.

AMEN