

The 3rd Sunday in Lent
New Hope Lutheran – March 15, 2020
“Wilderness Wanderers”

A couple of years ago it occurred to me that **our journey as New Hope Lutheran Church is a lot like when Moses lead the Israelites** out of Egypt - and their subsequent wandering around in the wilderness. Now, while I don't see myself as being anywhere near being a Moses figure, I still think the analogy fits. We are leaving an unsustainable situation in order to go find something better. We want to remember that this isn't something that only we want, but something God wants for us as well. And so we've been busy with leaving behind the past and moving on to the future.

In many ways it could also be **compared to what we, or our forebearers did in leaving European countries**. They left behind all they knew – many selling whatever they had - and came to Canada looking for something better here. They may have come searching for a better living. They may have come because life in the old country wasn't what they thought it should be. They may have come to avoid some form of persecution, or because they didn't like the political climate back home. And so, what they did was end up here searching for something they didn't have before.

But while some managed to just arrive and immediately find what they were looking for, **it wasn't always that simple or straightforward** for everyone. According to stories I've been told, a lot of people wound up beginning life in Canada doing back breaking bush work, living in camps, and wondering what had happened to their dream. Some wound up in a big city doing whatever kind of work they could find there. It took years of time and effort for them to finally land a decent job and start living the way they might have dreamt of. While I'm sure it felt like they were wandering around in a wilderness, (and some of them literally were!), it was through that process that they learned to appreciate what they had gained, and figure out what was truly important for them in life.

For a lot of those immigrants, **church was an important part of their lives**. Their faith had been a big part of their younger years, and they cherished that. At

the same time a congregation was also a tie to something they dearly missed, which was their culture. At church one could converse in the language of your childhood. You could savor the culinary delights of your homeland. People understood your background – for the most part. You can see something similar happening today in the growing congregations of more recent Lutheran immigrants; like our Chinese or African congregations.

At New Hope, **we have moved beyond that though**. While there are still some original migrants, most of us are 2nd and 3rd generation. While we may still identify with our background at some level, we don't have as many ties to the old country as those before us did. We are more likely to think of ourselves as *Canadians*, who come from a Finnish background. (or in my case, a German one). And while that's not a bad thing, part of the result is that the needs of Canadians of a Finnish background often don't include a faith community for their sense of culture anymore. As a congregation we have changed; become something different from those who arrived many decades ago. And as the years go by it has become more and more apparent that our needs as a congregation are different as well.

And that is **why we needed to leave something of the past behind**; it is so that we can move forward and address the needs of faith for our emerging community.

I understand that can be difficult. **It's always hard to leave the past**. I was pretty torn up when my mother **sold the family farm**. And it's not like we were there for generations! It was only 44 years, but it seemed like so much of me was tied to that place. In thinking about it though, I realized that I wasn't so tied to the place that I would buy it myself! Let's not be ridiculous! I wasn't ready to pony up the cash regardless of how many memories were there. Ultimately, I wanted to move on. My needs were elsewhere.

In spite of all that, **we still hate to let go of the past**, and sometimes to the point that **what we remember isn't actually an accurate** rendering of what really happened. We find this often in the book of Exodus. The 16th chapter records how the people were complaining to their leaders that they surely had it better in Egypt

where they had lamb stew and all the bread they could eat! It was like they had totally forgotten that they had been in slavery and forced to do more and more with less and less. It was like it escaped their memories that they had begged God on bended knees to leave that horrid place. All they were able to remember was what they missed in the present.

And in our **1st lesson for today we have a repeat of that** – just one chapter over! The people were thirsty. They had no water. Now, seeing as water is necessary for human life to survive, it could be said that they had a reason to complain.

But what we find time and time again is that their complaints only went as far as the human sphere. They turned to their human leaders rather than trusting in God. We find that– **when they asked for help from God - God looked after the people**. In chapter 16 they were sent quail and manna. In today's lesson God was approached; and water miraculously came from a rock, saving them from a certain death. What we see here is that – while humans (even humans as great as Moses), have limitations to what they can provide on their own – if we ask God, it will happen.

Something else we might take from this lesson is that – **just as water is necessary** for our physical survival – **God is also necessary for our spiritual survival**, something that goes beyond just existing here on earth. God supplies us with the living water that Jesus talks about in our gospel lesson. And in order for us to fully experience that, we need to open up the taps. For so many people, their faith comes from little more than a dripping facet. They may have gone to Sunday School or Bible Camp. They may have been confirmed. They may even have leafed through the Bible a few times. But that's about it.

And that's why it's so important for us to sow seeds amongst the general population, to open up the taps for them. We do this with the food bank and Wednesday Café, with the *We Care* bags for CLWR, through supporting children in impoverished lands – actions that show God's love. We open the tap through our Messy Church program, as well as being a part of the Hannah Lake ministries,

reaching out to both church and unchurched in our community. It is through opening that tap we can reap the harvest Jesus talks about.

And because these things all take energy, **we open the tap to living water for ourselves** through our activities together as a congregation. In worship, Lenten events, youth, Sunday School, group meetings, and even fellowship time - we are refreshed and rejuvenated, given direction, hearing the word of God, and exploring how we can more fully fulfill our baptismal vows.

So yes, like the Israelites, we are on a journey in a wilderness, meandering our way to who knows where. And yes, we are going to have difficulties along the way. This COVID -19 pandemic is one of them. I don't know what worship is going to look like in the coming weeks. You may have to view me on facebook. The journey may get rough.

But unlike the Israelites, **let's not forget why we began this journey**. And when we feel the pressures of the journey, let's remember to take our concerns, our worries, and our uncertainties to God who is waiting and listening to respond to them. Jesus tells us several times that God just wants to hear from us.

In today's gospel **Jesus also reminds us that just because we leave things behind** doesn't mean we can't continue to be God's people, just as the immigrants who came over the years have continued to be God's people when they wandered in their own wilderness. The conversation today with the Samaritan woman is also a reminder that wherever we go, however we are going to handle worship, God will go with us also. So let us journey onward, confident that we are truly in God's hands, looked after, and looked over. That is the faith we are each called to. Amen.