

Nostalgia

October 1, 2017

Exodus 17: 1-16

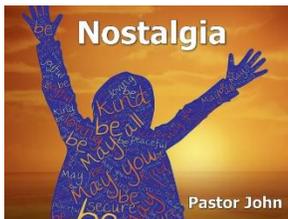
The Israelites left the desert and moved from one place to another each time the LORD ordered them to. Once they camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for them to drink. ² The people started complaining to Moses, "Give us some water!" Moses replied, "Why are you complaining to me and trying to put the LORD to the test?" ³ But the people were thirsty and kept on complaining, "Moses, did you bring us out of Egypt just to let us and our families and our animals die of thirst?"

⁴ Then Moses prayed to the LORD, "What am I going to do with these people? They are about to stone me to death!" ⁵ The LORD answered, "Take some of the leaders with you and go ahead of the rest of the people. Also take along the walking stick you used to strike the Nile River, ⁶ and when you get to the rock at Mount Sinai, I will be there with you. Strike the rock with the stick, and water will pour out for the people to drink." Moses did this while the leaders watched.

⁷ The people had complained and tested the LORD by asking, "Is the LORD really with us?" So Moses named that place Massah, which means "testing" and Meribah, which means "complaining."

⁸ When the Israelites were at Rephidim, they were attacked by the Amalekites. ⁹ So Moses told Joshua, "Have some men ready to attack the Amalekites tomorrow. I will stand on a hilltop, holding this walking stick that has the power of God." ¹⁰ Joshua led the attack as Moses had commanded, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur stood on the hilltop. ¹¹ The Israelites out-fought the Amalekites as long as Moses held up his arms, but they started losing whenever

he had to lower them. ¹² Finally, Moses was so tired that Aaron and Hur got a rock for him to sit on. Then they stood beside him and supported his arms in the same position until sunset. ¹³ That's how Joshua defeated the Amalekites. ¹⁴ Afterwards, the LORD said to Moses, "Write an account of this victory and read it to Joshua. I want the Amalekites to be forgotten forever." ¹⁵ Moses built an altar and named it "The LORD Gives Me Victory." ¹⁶ Then Moses explained, "This is because I depended on the LORD. But in future generations, the LORD will have to fight the Amalekites again."



Today we begin our new series, "The Enemies of Gratitude". As we delve into the things that keep us from being grateful, we will seek to discover God's blessings in our lives. Over the course of these five weeks we will look at how we lose focus on the things of God as we are distracted by how things could be or used to be better, by thinking that tells us we are not getting what we deserve, or by life's struggles that just seem to keep us down. Over these five weeks we will wrestle with nostalgia or worry or entitlement or greed or disappointment as we find a faithful and better "attitude of gratitude". Let us pray.

To fully appreciate the situation we come to in today's scripture, let us briefly review the recent past for these Israelites. An entire nation has been freed from bondage in Egypt. One could identify the Passover as the greatest single event in their history. Very soon they find their escape route blocked by a vast sea, the Egyptian army roaring up behind them. They pray to God and He makes it

happen – God parts the sea, they cross to freedom on dry land, and the sea closes back in, wiping out the entire Egyptian army. The Israelites then spend three days dancing and singing praises to God for His saving hand. They are filled with gratitude and joy over God once again saving them. After three days, they set out again, following as God leads. After three more days, they find water, but it is bitter. They grumble and God again intervenes, making the water sweet. A month and a half later, as they continued to trek on towards the Promised Land, they become hungry. God again responds to their complaints, sending quail each evening and providing manna each morning. The journey begins again and they soon come to camp at Rephidim. Here is where our scripture passage today picks up the story.

It is the story of the good old days. We all have them, don't we? In today's passage, we find out that there was once again no water where the Israelites were camped. The people get thirsty. Their animals need water. They come and complain to Moses. His response:

"Why are you complaining to me and trying to put the LORD to the test?" There is a hint of frustration that we can hear in

Moses' response. Time after time God has intervened and provided a way. Time after time. In very recent history. Why can't the people simply turn to God and trust that He will again provide for their needs? Why complain to Moses? Why test God?



their future too. They were no longer trusting that through Moses, God really was going to lead them to a new place, to a better place, to the Promised Land. In addition to being tired and frustrated, they were also hungry and thirsty. And they had begun to question whether their leader, Moses, was even leading them in the right direction. They questioned whether it had been wise to follow Moses. They wondered if, perhaps, somewhere along the way, something had gone wrong with their leader. Maybe Moses didn't know the way. Maybe he'd led them in the wrong direction. After all, God had not promised them a dry, desert land with no food and no water. God had promised them a land flowing with milk and honey. The wilderness of Rephidim was not flowing with anything.

And so, in their tired, frustrated, hungry, thirsty, despairing state of mind, the people rebelled. They decided that they had put their trust in a faulty leader who had led them the wrong way. And not only that – they also decided that they'd made a big mistake to trust in the Lord God. So they did what people tend to do when they get angry and frightened, tired and hungry, and thirsty and upset. They grumbled and complained and looked for someone to blame, a scapegoat for their grievances. They found Moses.

So Moses, whom God had called to lead the people to freedom, finds himself once again under attack by the very people he has risked his life to help. Why are we humans this way? Why do we, instead of trusting the Lord, decide that it's a better use of our time and energy to look longingly to the past, to grumble and complain, to find someone to blame? Why does all this make us feel better

about our troubles than it does to look deep inside and take responsibility for our own hearts, our own lives, our own capacity, or incapacity, to forgive and to move forward?

As Christians, we can also get stuck in the nostalgia of the past. Sometimes we too can long for those good old days. It can be easy to do. Remember the day when church services were just packed to the gills? Remember the day when the Sunday School classes were overflowing with happy and well-behaved children? Remember the day.

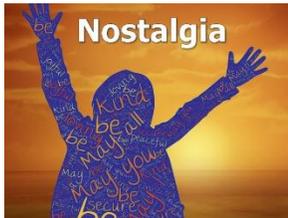
But in reality, there are a few things in life that are guaranteed. We will be born and we will die. In between, there will be change. Just as with the Israelites, change can be hard to go through. It can be stepping into the unknown, not being sure where God will lead; therefore, it can be scary. But to stay stuck in the past only limits us. Or worse, it can do us harm. To illustrate that value of not staying stuck in the past, a few pictures from the past. Do any of you long for the old sanctuary? Change was tough and required a lot of work – by many of you here today. There was a cost in many ways, but the end result is really great. Change was good. God provided a vision and the vision was caught by the people. Look where we are now. Anyone long for the old house that used to sit just south of the church? Just thought I should ask.



arms grow tired. Next Aaron and Hur stand on each side of Moses and hold up his arms. As sunset arrives, Joshua finally wins the day and the Amalekites are defeated. Moses builds an altar and names it "The LORD Gives Me Victory". Moses explains that the victory won that day came because he depended on the Lord. He trusted in God. What would that be like – to live trusting into God's preferred future for our lives, for our world, and for our church? Imagine.



[Play video.]



Just as God continued to provide over and over for the chosen people of Israel, God desires to provide over and over for His children today, for you and for me. When we choose to be open to God and to seek God's presence in our lives, we too will experience the power of God at work. When we live with an eye focused on the possibilities, on the opportunities ahead instead of turned back to the 'good old days', then we are opening ourselves to the Lord to bring those streams of living water flowing through our lives. Imagine that new day. On this day, those streams will flow over us. This day we will each be made new as we celebrate Holy Communion.

Today is World Communion Sunday. We find ourselves living in a time when we are lining up and choosing sides, when we are naming our scapegoats, and when we are pointing fingers of blame at everyone but ourselves. These seem to be our predominant coping mechanisms today. But perhaps we would do well to listen to the wisdom of Paul, to hear his voice over the screaming voices of the

endlessly disappointed, tired and angry masses who feel that their leaders, others, and maybe even God, have not provided for them what they feel entitled to have.

As we hear the invitation today and make our own confessions of sin during our time of communion, let us not be like the Israelites. Let us not look for someone to blame for our lot in life. Let us not remain stuck in the nostalgia of the past. Instead, let us hear the voice of God speaking loud and clear, above the clamor of the shouting voices: "Trust! Trust me!"

And as we seek to trust in God, let us continue to stake our claim on the good news of Jesus Christ, which is offered to all of us without condition and without merit. Paul wrote: "*Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. This proves God's love for us. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!*" Amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) When has God 'parted the sea' or led you through a time or trial? How has this affected your faith and your trust in God? How can you share this?
- 2) In what cases do you find yourself longing for the past a bit too much? Turn this over to God in prayer, trusting in His care and love.
- 3) How is God revealing His desired or preferred future for you and your life? How can you live more into what God has in store for you?