

Fourth Sunday In Lent

Numbers 21: 4-9

March 15, 2015

My Fellow Redeemed In Christ,

In Many Ways Our Text Is A Picture Of What Happens To All Of God's People In All Times And Places. The Children Of Israel Had Been Delivered From The Bondage Of Slavery In Egypt. That Was Good! Can You Imagine Their Joy? But There Was More. He Also Promised To Bring Them Into Their Very Own Land, A Land Flowing With Milk And Honey. In Other Words A Beautiful Land Rich In Resources.....The Promised Land. And That Was Good Too! But ....In Between Their Deliverance From Egypt And Their Arrival In The Promised Land, They Spent Forty Years Wandering Around In The Hostile And Unattractive Wilderness. They Didn't See That Coming! In This Story God Has Something To Also Teach Us. He Has Also Delivered Us From The Bondage Of Slavery..... The Slavery Of Sin, Death And The Power Of The Devil. This Is Good! And He Has Also Promised To Take Us To A Much Better World Than This One: Eternal Life In A New Heaven And New Earth. This Too Is Good! But.... Like In Our Old Testament Reading... We Have Not Yet Arrived In That Promised Land. We Are Still Waiting....Wandering, So To Speak, In This Wilderness Of The World We Live In. And Like The People Of Israel Long Ago Sometimes It Gets Quite Difficult. And Like Them God Wants Us To Learn About **“Living Between Deliverance And Arrival.**

I. We Know From Experience That Not Only Children But Even We Adults Can Become Impatient While Waiting For Good Things To Happen.

A. In Our Text The People Of Israel Had Grown Tired Of Waiting. It Had Been Forty Years Since They Left Egypt....Forty Years!.....And They Still Had Not Arrived In The Promised Land. And Even Though God Had Provided For Their Needs.....It Was A Difficult Experience. Life Was Not Easy. And Just As It Looked Like They Were Finally Going To Enter The Promised Land.....Another Problem Came Up. The Nation Of Edom Would Not Let Them Go Through Their Land To Reach The Promised Land. This Meant That In Order To Avoid War, Israel Would Have To Go Around The Country Of Edom With More Delays And More Hardships. And This Is Where Our Text Picks Up The Story. The People Had Had Enough. They Were Tired And Out Of Patience. And So They Did What We Human Beings Are So Good At: They Started To Complain.....Not Only Against Moses....But Even Against God: **“Why Have You Brought Us Up Out Of Egypt To Die In The Wilderness? For There Is No Food And No Water, And We Loathe This Worthless Food” (V. 5, Esv).** The Food They Were Referring To Was The Miraculous Manna That God Sent Them From Heaven. Obviously They Had Forgotten Just How Bad It Was When They Were Slaves In Egypt. Instead Of Seeing What God Had Done For Them They Complained About

What He Hadn't Done For Them. They Were Losing Their Faith In God And His Promises. And As A Result They Had Become Incredibly Ungrateful For All The Wonderful Things God Had Done For Them. Instead Of Seeing God As Their Savior They Were Seeing Him As Their Enemy.

B. And Truth Be Told The Same Thing Can Happen To Us. God Has Done Wonderful And Great Things For Us In Jesus Christ, Who Like The Bronze Snake, Was Lifted Up On The Cross To Deliver Us From The Slavery Of Sin And Death And From The Kingdom Of Satan. And He Has Promised To Raise Us From The Dead To Live In A New World Of Joy, A World Without Sin And Death Lived In The Very Presence Of God And Jesus Christ. But Just Like The People Of Israel...We Have To Wait. Living In This World Is Our **“Wilderness Experience.”** And Like The People Of Israel We Can Forget All The Good Things That God Has Done For Us And Only See Our Problems. But Even In The Midst Of Difficult Things We Still Have God's Promises And Blessings That He Gives To Us In His Word And Sacraments, The Means Of Grace. And Yet, Like Israel Despising The Manna Given By God...We Christians Can Think Little Of The Manna Of His Word And Sacraments. Think About How Much Time We Christians Spend Watching Tv, Listening To The Radio, Being On The Computer, Playing Video Games, And Reading Books...And So Many Other Things..... And Spend So Little Time With God's Word, Remembering Our Baptism And Partaking Of Our Lord's Supper. And When There Are Conflicts Between Going To Church On Sunday Mornings And Other Activities How Often Do Christians Choose Something Over God's Word And Sacraments? And Yet Where Only Do We Find God's Deliverance In Jesus Christ? Only His Word And Sacraments....And So If We Are Not Careful, We Can Easily Neglect God's Word And Sacraments And Treat Them As **“Worthless Food”** In The Same Way The People Of Israel Treated The Manna Sent From God. And Of Course, Once Our Focus Is Off The Manna Of God's Word And Sacraments It's Easy To Complain About What's Not Right With Our Lives.

ii. And Once This Happens We Have Lost Our Spiritual Focus. But God Loves Us Too Much To Let That Happen As We See From Our Lesson.

A. The People Of Israel Found That Out The Hard Way As God Sent Poisonous Snakes To Get Their Focus Back. They Had Made A Huge Miscalculation. They Thought That They Could Challenge God's Authority And Complain And Question His Integrity And Love. Bad Idea. Most Parents Don't Put Up With Temper Tantrums And God Doesn't Either. But Once The People Started Dying From Poisonous Snake Bites The People Had A Change Of Heart. Imagine That! They Came To Moses, God's Spokesman, And Said, If I Might Put It Into Good American Slang: **“Uh, Moses, We Think We've Made A Big Mistake Here.....Do You Think You Could Talk To God And See If He Would Forgive Us And Take The Snakes Away.”** What A Different Attitude! What A Different Tone! And This Is Exactly Why God Sent The Snakes In The First Place: To Humble Them Before God And To Restore Their Focus On God's Love

And Promises. And To Show Them His Love He Told Moses To Make The Bronze Snake So That Anyone Who Would Look At It Would Be Healed. And That's Exactly What Happened: Everyone Who Looked At That Bronze Snaking Trusting In God's Promise Was Healed. And Since God Kept That Promise The People Could Be Assured That He Would Also Keep His Promise To Bring Them Into The Promised Land Because God Always Keeps His Promises....Always.

B. And So It Is With Us. There Might Be Times In Our Lives That God Might Send Us Some Poisonous Snakes...Not Real Snakes Of Course. But The Poisonous Snake Of Problems And Suffering. And Why Would He Do That? So, We Won't Be Tempted To Ignore Him, Take Him For Granted, Or Defy Him ...And Specifically So That We Don't Neglect The Manna Of His Means Of Grace, His Word And Sacraments. But Of Course, Like Children Being Disciplined By Their Parents, We Don't Like It...But He Does It For The Same Reason He Did It To The People Of Israel: To Keep Us Humble And To Keep Our Focus Off The Things Of This World And On His Promises Which Are Only Found In His Word And Sacraments. And So Listen To What The Psalmist Says In Psalm 119: **"Before I Was Afflicted I Went Astray, But Now I Keep Your Word....It Is Good For Me That I Was Afflicted, That I Might Learn Your Statues....I Know, O Lord, That Your Rules Are Righteous, And That In Faithfulness You Have Afflicted Me" (Vv. 67, 71, 75, Esv).** When We Are Having Problems Or Suffering It Is Easy To Complain And Think That God Has Forgotten Us Or He Doesn't Love Us. And Yet, God Uses Such Things For Our Good.....Our Spiritual Good As The Author Of Hebrews Says So Well: **"It Is For Discipline That You Have To Endure. God Is Treating You As Sons....He Disciplines Us For Our Good, That We May Share In His Holiness. For The Moment All Discipline Seems Painful Rather Than Pleasant, But Later It Yields The Peaceful Fruit Of Righteousness To Those Who Have Been Trained By It" (12: 7, 10, 11, Esv).** God Uses The Language Of A Parent And A Child. Parents Understand What God Is Saying And Doing.....But Children Usually Do Not. But, Of Course, In Relationship To God We Are All Children.... And That's Why We Don't Always Understand Or Like His Discipline.....And Yet.....It Is For Our Good.... To Keep Our Focus On Him, His Love And His Promises In Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: Like The People Of Israel Long Ago There Is Always The Danger That We Will Lose Our Focus On The Things Of God. We Can Easily Live Our Lives As If This Is The Only Life We Will Ever Have...And There Is No Other Life To Come.....But Just Like God Promised The People Of Israel That They Would Enter The Promised Land....And That Day Finally Came.....So Likewise The Day Will Finally Come When Jesus Will Return To Take Us To Eternal Life In A New World, A New Heaven And A New Earth. And As We Wait For That..... We Must Be Careful Not To Let This Wilderness Journey We Call Life To Distract Us From The Things Of God.... And Because God Loves Us He Might Occasionally

Send The Poisonous Snakes Of Difficulties And Sufferings To Help Us Keep Our Focus On That New World That God Has Promised Us. Let's Be Honest...If This World Was Perfect And Problem Free.....Why Would We Want Another One? Amen.