

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity, November 13, 2011

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 54, 166:1, 434, 422, 50.

Lessons: Exodus 15:1-22, Hebrews 3:5-19, John 6:43-51.

Sermon Text: Hebrews 3:5-9.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

For 40 years God's chosen people wandered in the wilderness between the time they left Egypt and the time they came into the Promised Land, Canaan. Think about how long 40 years really is. Those of you who are somewhat older than 40 years can think back 40 years and marvel at all that has happened in that time. 40 years ago takes us back to the year 1971. Those of you who are younger than 40 years may find it harder to visualize 40 years. If you are 10 years old, that's four times your age. If you are 10 years old, your parents may possibly not even be approaching 40 years of age. So that would be more than their entire lifetime.

But God's people spent 40 years in the wilderness, when a direct trip from Egypt to Canaan could possibly have been walked in a number of months. Remember that 600,000 men – not counting women and children left Egypt. God had good reason for letting his chosen people wander in the desert. Today we see from Scripture how

ISRAEL WANDERED IN THE DESERT

- 1. God provided sweet water at Marah.**
- 2. God provided for his ungrateful people for 40 years,**
- 3. But the unbelieving did not enter into the Promised Land.**

In our Old Testament lesson today you heard Moses' song of praise to God. You even heard his sister Miriam's song of praise to God in which the women of Israel also joined.

Then we read in Exodus 15:22-26: *"Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.) So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, 'What are we to drink?' Then Moses cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the LORD made a decree and a law for them, and there he tested them. He said, 'If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you.'"*

Following the pillar of cloud, which showed that God was with them, Moses led the people. You can see that it didn't take very long for God's people to grumble and complain after such a spectacular deliverance from the Egyptian army at the Red Sea. For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water. Then when they came to water they couldn't drink it because it was bitter. So you read *"the people grumbled against Moses, saying, 'What are we to drink?'"* They grumble, they complain, they weren't content with what God gave them. Now of course wouldn't we grumble too? When we drink water, we don't want to drink bitter water. I know that many of you have experienced drinking bitter water. This may have been an alkaline water that you might have encountered out West, or this might have been a highly mineralized water and we probably hated the taste. We all want sweet, good tasting water. I am not trying to justify their complaining and grumbling. But I want you to see a pattern starting here. Of course their grumbling didn't start at this time. They grumbled and

complained and were even afraid even before they crossed the Red Sea. But God miraculously made the water sweet, just by having Moses throw a piece of wood God showed him into the water. That made the water sweet for hundreds of thousands of people, lest we think that the wood simply flavored the water.

Then we read that the ***“LORD made a decree and a law for them, and there he tested them. He said, ‘If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you.’”***

We must remember that God provided many details of these 40 years and caused them to be written down by Moses. These details are included in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. It is not until the book of Joshua that God begins to record the actual entering into the Promised Land. So I would like you to realize that many, many sermons could be presented about the details found in these books of the Bible which document their time in the wilderness. There is far too much detail for just one sermon about how God provided for his people even though they grumbled and complained repeatedly.

Several weeks ago you heard how God through his mighty power delivered his people from their slavery in Egypt and from Pharaoh’s army at the Red Sea.

But they complained repeatedly. The water at Marah was bitter. They had no food at another time. They had no water at Rephadim. The Amalekite army attacked them. But God provided for them repeatedly in miraculous ways.

When they had no food we read in Exodus 16:11-26 ***“The LORD said to Moses, ‘I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.’” That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, ‘What is it?’ For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, ‘It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat. This is what the LORD has commanded: “Each one is to gather as much as he needs. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.”’ The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. And when they measured it by the omer, he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed. Then Moses said to them, ‘No one is to keep any of it until morning.’ However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them. Each morning everyone gathered as much as he needed, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away. On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much--two omers for each person--and the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses. He said to them, ‘This is what the LORD commanded: “Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.”’ So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. ‘Eat it today,’ Moses said, ‘because today is a Sabbath to the LORD. You will not find any of it on the ground today. Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any.’”***

God provided manna and quails to eat. And we read how long the manna continued in Exodus 16:35: ***“The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan.”***

God provided water out of the rock in the wilderness – twice. When the Amalekite army attacked them, God gave victory in battle through Moses’ raised arms in prayer and Joshua’s leading the Israelite army.

He comforted and strengthened them through the annual Passover meal. He commanded the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles, which was to be an annual reminder of the 40 years when they lived in tents in the desert. He commanded the observance of Pentecost, a harvest festival.

At Mount Sinai he gave them his law. This included his moral law, which is binding on all men for all time. We learn God’s moral law as summarized in the Ten Commandments. At Mount Sinai he also gave them all the civil laws that they needed to function as a nation, both while they were traveling through the wilderness, and when they got to the Promised Land. In addition God gave them ceremonial laws to regulate their worship.

These ceremonial laws pointed toward their eternal salvation, found in Jesus Christ, through such things as blood sacrifices foreshadowing the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God's Son and the Sabbath rest we find through Jesus Christ.

Through the hardships of life in the wilderness God trained and toughened his people into a strong nation.

Throughout their time in the wilderness God gave them many pictures of the coming Savior. These pictures included sacrifices of animals and other items of value – items of food – that pointed toward the Savior, Jesus Christ. These pictures included Moses as a symbol or type of the coming deliverer and mediator, Jesus the Son of God. These pictures included the brass serpent put up on a pole as a symbol or type of the Redeemer nailed on the cross.

Through his servant Moses, God repeated the promises of the Messiah that were given to the patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – with added details.

God blessed his people abundantly in preparation for the coming conquest of the land of the seven tribes of the people of Canaan.

But they grumbled repeatedly. They sinned countless times and in countless ways against God and his laws. But there was a price to pay for their repeated sinning. We read in Numbers 14:21-23: ***"Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth, not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times – not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it."***

Joshua and Caleb were the only two who were permitted to enter the Promised Land. Everyone else of the estimated 2,000,000 descendants of Abraham who left Egypt died in the desert. They did not enter the promised land of Canaan because of their repeated sins.

Of the twelve spies sent into Canaan, Joshua and Caleb were the only two spies who had confidence and faith that the Lord would help them conquer the powerful tribes living in Canaan.

We see these blessings summarized in Deuteronomy 8:1-5: ***"Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land that the LORD promised on oath to your forefathers. Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you."***

God's people, the Israelites, had a difficult journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. And it was their fault, just as our sins rest upon us. God had delivered them from Pharaoh and his army by parting the Red Sea and leading them through it. Surely God was with them! In the same way God delivers us from death, the power of the devil, and from our sins with his forgiveness in Jesus Christ. We can learn from them that it did not take long for them to doubt God's goodness and to forget to trust in Him. So as we remember their difficulties in the wilderness, we pray 'Lord God, let us not rebel or grumble and complain against you, but let us enter the Promised Land of heaven.' This we ask in the name of Jesus our Redeemer. Amen.