

The Not-So-Good Old Days
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Theme:

When we are in the wilderness – even for a short time – it is very easy for us to get amnesia. We forget God’s faithfulness, we get nostalgic for the past because it was familiar even though it was not so great. We complain. It doesn’t take long for our “true” selves to show up!

Exodus 16:1-3 NIV

The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. 2 In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. 3 The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”

Intro:

How long can you be on a camping trip before your true self shows up? The “self” that wants – no, NEEDS – hot things? Warm bed, hot meals, hot showers? How long before the whining starts?

For the newly freed people of Israel, it took about a month.

Most of us are familiar with the story: After the 10 Plagues, Pharaoh finally relents. But as the people arrive at the Red Sea, they look back and see Pharaoh and his army pursuing. They are trapped. Yet the Sea parts, they walk on dry land, God swallows up the army as the Sea closes up again, and the Israelites are safe.

But one thing is certain: If, after over 400 years, they considered Egypt to be home, then there was no going home again.

The Main Points: The Complaint, The Commandment, and the Cure

The **Complaint**: Things were so much better back then...

- The whole community grumbled. I wonder who started it?
- Against Moses and Aaron. The leaders are the target. It's too easy for us blame our troubles on others instead of accepting our contribution.
- The form of the complaint: "If only..."

Nostalgia is a pernicious form of selective amnesia. It leads us to remember only the good parts of the past, glossing over the hard parts. After a month in the wilderness, the people focus on what it was like to get a hot meal but forget that they had been slaves! When we are nostalgic about the past, we inevitably complain about the present and despair about the future. That is why they say, "We wish Yahweh had just killed us back in Egypt, because we are certain Yahweh intends to let us starve to death out here!"

But we can only experience God in the present.

The **Commandment**:

- The one commandment God repeats more than any other is: REMEMBER.
- The discipline of remembering requires that we remember the whole story, not just the parts that support our argument.
- Jewish tradition gives us the wonderful gift of telling the whole, unvarnished truth. It preserves the stories about the failures of our ancestors and our heroes. It preserves the prophetic tradition in which God's representatives called the people out on their bad behavior. The command to remember is not about nostalgia. It is about remembering the whole history, lest we repeat it. (Though of course we do repeat over and over again. Then remembering our stories can give us compassion for those who came before, and for ourselves when we realize the lessons we are having to learn are THE lessons.)
- As Transition Pastor, one of my primary tasks is to help you remember and reconcile yourselves to the whole of WVPC's story. The good parts. And the not-so-good parts.

The **Cure**

It may not seem like this text is about idolatry, but when the Israelites complain they are really saying: Life was better with the gods of Egypt than with Yahweh.

My friend Pastor Paul: “The cure for idolatry is gratitude.”

Response to the Word: Leaves of Gratitude

So this morning, as a response to God’s Word to us, we are going to attach paper leaves with things we are thankful for written on them to our little artificial ficus!

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