

# Graffiti



*The words that define our faith have the potential to embody the beauty and mystery of our faith. But all too often, they instead become boundary markers, marking who is welcome and who is not. In this series, we seek to recover the beauty of these words, and through them, the beauty and power of the faith into which God has invited us.*

## **Life in the Wilderness**

Last week, we discussed our notions of Salvation - and the fact that in the Church we've reduced the idea of Salvation down to the moment of Atonement, the conversion experience, when we pass from death into life. Of course that *is* Salvation, but we saw last week that it's better to talk about that experience as the place where Salvation begins, rather than the whole of the experience.

We saw last week that the Scriptures use the story of Israel's rescue from Egypt as the template for our own rescue from Sin and Death. We saw that God rescued Israel from Egypt and led them to the Promised Land, but Israel wasn't ready to enter. They were too scared because even though they'd been freed from slavery, they still lived like slaves. So God took them into the wilderness for 40 years and romanced them. God led them in the wilderness, provided for them and cared for them until the older generation - the generation of slaves - had died off and the new, younger generation who only knew freedom had risen up. This new, free generation was ready to live in God's Promised Land precisely because they'd spent 40 years in the wilderness being romanced by God.

If that story is our template, then we live between Egypt and the Promised Land. We are right now being romanced by God, learning to live in the freedom God promises. Jesus' death as our Passover Lamb freed us from Death and Sin, and now we're learning how not to live as slaves.

The big question I want to explore this week is HOW do we learn to live as free people? How do we learn to leave behind the slavery we grew up in? That process is called "Sanctification", and the way we understand it is one of the core doctrines of the Nazarene denomination to which this particular gathering belongs.

## **Sanctification**

So what is "Sanctification"? The easy answer is that it's the process of making something 'sacred', which is another word for 'holy'. The basis of this word is set-apartness or specialness. The word in most languages comes from the religious realm, and it signifies that some things or people have been marked

out as special, as different, as acceptable or welcomed by the god. Underlying this concept is a recognition that there's something about the world that's not quite right, and that special measures must be taken in order for something to be fit to be in the god's presence.

:: aside :: Can you see how easily this can turn into legalism or elitism? How easy it is to let 'holiness' turn into a boundary line? This is holy and that is not. This is good and that is not. I am holy and you are not. It's no wonder we've got the phrase 'holier than thou', as though God has created some sort of exclusive club you have to be good enough to get into. Of course that's not the picture of God we've been discovering during this series. Remember, what's at stake here isn't good enough. It's not right and wrong. It's slavery and freedom. Life and death.

And that's what we see in the Wilderness. Egypt is not the Promised Land. Slaves are not free. The Dead are not living. God is the god not of the dead, but of the living. Not of slaves, but of free. Not of Egypt, but of the Promised Land.

So when we ask how we're sanctified, how we're made holy, we're asking how we learn to live as God's children instead of Egypt's slaves. And as we saw last week, that happens out here in the wilderness, in that place between Egypt and the Promised Land, between Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday.

### **Wandering but not Lost**

Have you ever seen that bumper sticker that says, 'Not all who wander are lost'? It's a great point. Sometimes, things just take time. Sometimes, life is just a process. We saw that it took Israel 40 years to be ready to enter the Promised Land, and the process of Sanctification can be the same for us.

I want to suggest that there's at least one really important difference between wandering and being lost. How many of us in here will admit to having been lost before? Have you ever been following someone who is lost? It's a terrifying thing to be lost. You can always tell, right? Suddenly things don't look familiar, you start glancing around at signs more frequently, you want a landmark you recognize, getting more and more desperate.

What keeps us from getting lost is having a clear goal and a clear path to that goal. And in this regard, the scriptures give us great directions. We saw last week that in the Incarnation, God became one of us to show us the way back to him. This is how Paul describes our goal in Philippians 2:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Therefore, my beloved... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. -- Philippians 2:5-13

Jesus' life is our example of how to live in the wilderness. We are to become people who imitate Jesus. That's our direction. That's our goal. That's how we measure where we are, and how far we have to go. And just like the Israelites died in the wilderness, just like Jesus was crucified, there's death in it for us.

### **Dying with Jesus**

I would love for this to be the part of our time together that I pull back the curtain and reveal the latest innovation in Jesus technology, the Christ-maker 3000 or something like that.

I'd love to introduce you to a little pill you take that makes you an instant Jesus All-Star. But the truth is, there's no such thing.

We don't like to talk about this, but the New Testament describes the wilderness as a place where we experience death. It makes sense - the old Israelites, the ones who were ingrained with the mindset of slaves - had to die. They weren't fit to live in the Promised Land.

In the same way, our path to the Promised Land isn't *around* the Cross, but through it. Jesus died in our place. As our Passover Lamb, he opened the Promised Land through his Cross. We can join Jesus in his death, we can die *through* him, so that we can live his life. So that we can have his mind in us. Paul says it like this:

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. -- Galatians 2:19-20

Paul talks about the Christian life as one of crucifixion, of a process of letting our old slave selves die and learning to live as little Jesuses (which is what "Christian" means). We are all supposed to become reflections, images of Jesus.

In another of his letters, Paul says it like this:

All of us... are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God... We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. -- 2 Corinthians 3:18-4:11

Doesn't sound especially fun, this dying, does it? It's not very glamorous. That might be why we don't like to talk about it very much.

But if we really do think like slaves, then we need to experience a kind of death in order to make it into the Promised Land. We need to be recreated, remade. Reborn. We need a whole new life.

Paul tells the Colossian church this way:

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). -- Colossians 3:2-5

### **God's Counterintuitive Wisdom: A Case Study**

What's tough about this is that because we were all raised like slaves, raised in an Exchange Economy, raised to fear and serve Death, this dying and new life doesn't come naturally to us. It seems counter-intuitive.

Consider, for example, how we spend our time. If you're anything like me, then you're a very busy person. It's not just work, though we do work a lot. It's spending time with our families and friends, running errands, trying to relax. It seems like everything we do asks more and more and more of us. And for at least the last 100 years or so, technology has been promising us that life would get simpler, that we'd work less and less. When personal computers first came out, everyone was predicting a 4-day work week. But that's laughable these days; if anything, we work *more*, not less. Six- or even seven-day work weeks are not uncommon. And families rarely share meals without distractions. We always have a TV on or our phones out (Amanda gets mad at me pretty often for how easily I'm distracted by technology).

And that's our culture. We are pulled in so many directions because our culture just takes and takes and takes. There's never enough; we're always defined by what we produce. We're told by our culture that to produce, to give and give and give, is the way to happiness. That we can't take a break because even if we do, someone else won't. They'll work harder or practice longer and then they'll succeed while we (or our kids) fail.

Egypt has us convinced that we are slaves to time, that we must work and work and give and give and we don't have time for breaks.

But God tells us that we **are** to take breaks. Weekly. When we talk about Sabbath, we talk about God's command to take a full day each week when we don't work, we don't produce. We don't slave away.

A full day each week when we just play. Relax. Unplug. Be fully present with our friends and family.

Can you imagine a whole day without your cell phone? When your TV is off and you don't check your email or Facebook?

A whole day where you intentionally plan activities that energize you, like finishing that book you've been reading for the past year, or dusting off those old board games. Taking a walk or having a snowball fight.

Can you imagine refusing a job or promotion because it demands too much of your time? Or not signing your kids up for this league or that team because of how full your family schedule already is? Reordering your entire life – from where you live and what you drive to what you do for fun so that taking regular, weekly breaks is possible? Sounds preposterous, doesn't it?

God can't possibly care how we spend our time, can he? Wouldn't many of us almost rather die than try to tweak our schedules, let alone rearrange our lives? Isn't it **foolish** to imagine that keeping Sabbath has anything to do with working out our sanctification?

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God... Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Hasn't God made the wisdom of the world foolish? For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. -- 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

God is clear that only slaves don't keep Sabbath. Only slaves let the world tell them how they'll use their time.

Of course, keeping Sabbath isn't a magic pill. If you start keeping Sabbath, you won't magically suddenly become a super-Christian, anymore than reading your Bible or praying do. No, this is just a good place to start. It's a suggestion, an idea.

If you want to learn to live as a free person, start by sanctifying your time. God cares about your time. And God's people care about time.

It sounds foolish to slaves, and to free people who still live like slaves. It sounds unreasonable. It sounds absurd. When we hear someone suggest we do something as radical as shutting our phones off once a week we want to shout them down. Tell them they're just talking crazy.

Of course we do. Because God's wisdom seems foolish to those who live like they're dying.

What could happen if we recognized that God's Promised Land is not our Egypt? And what if we confessed that we still live too often like we're still in Egypt? That we still let our culture dictate our values, our actions and even our calendars?

And if we could confess that, then what if we quit living like we were still in Egypt? What if we started taking God seriously? What if we started trying to live the way he asks us to? Not because we have to. Not out of some sort of obligation but because we believe Jesus when he says,

**"I am the way, the truth and the life." -- John 14:6**

Could we recognize that in God's reality, our time is sacred? That God calls us to live differently from the world. Not because we're better than the world, but because the ways of the world bring Death.

Brothers and sisters, we live in the wilderness. We are led by God. And if we will follow, God will teach us to live the life Jesus lived, the fully human life, the life we were created to live. And we can make this one choice - to mark time each week that is holy, set apart, sanctified - to chase after Jesus. We can look at our lives with eyes that want to see truly and mark out time.

It will not be easy. Keeping Sabbath in a culture that does not believe time matters is radical. It's counter-cultural by its very definition.

It will feel a little bit like dying.

If you're not used to sharing meals, it'll be weird. If you're not used to meals without TV or phones to divide and distract your attention it will be weird. If you're not used to playing together, it will be weird.

Because here's the thing. The wilderness isn't an easy place to live. As I said earlier, there's not a magic pill. There's no Jesus-matic 3000. There's only you and your decisions.

Sabbath creates sacred space in our lives. It's a holy pause. It gives God a chance to breathe a fresh Spirit into our lives and recreate us. Renew us. Sanctify us. To Save us.

### **Work it Out**

Believe it or not, Sanctification is something you pursue. Something you chase after. Remember what Paul said in Philippians 2?

*"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure." -- Philippians 2:12-13*

You're not on the path to Sanctification alone. You're not wandering alone in the wilderness. God is leading you. God is working in you and in your friends and family. God is working in all of us, enabling us.

Because God has this crazy idea that we actually can make it to his Promised Land. As crazy as it sounds, God actually thinks you can learn to live free of Sin. To live as one of God's children, not a slave to Death. And God is not only rooting for you, but God is even now in this very moment working in and around you to bring you to that place.

If that's true, then how can we do anything less than chase after him with everything in us? Isn't that why the writer of Hebrews says,

"Let us lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the one who started and will complete our faith." -- Hebrews 12:1-2

Is it going to be hard? Yes, it's going to be hard. You're crucifying your old self. You're learning to die to the patterns of sin and death that you've grown up with. You're developing new, counter-culture and counterintuitive habits. Of course that's hard! Since when in life has anything worth doing been easy?

But you're not doing it alone. This isn't a solo race. Jesus takes full responsibility for you. He started your race and he's going to finish it.

Brothers and sisters, I feel a tremendous sense of awe and pride when I stand before you. This room is filled with potential, overflowing with possibility. We are a people who had been slaves. But thanks to God, who came and gave himself as our Passover Lamb, we have been freed from Death. And now we are wandering together in the wilderness of this life, this space between Egypt and our coming Promised Land.

Together we are learning how to live in God's Kingdom instead of our Slavery. Together we are learning what it means to be holy. To be set apart. To refuse to conform to the death-bringing patters this world teaches us. Instead, to cling to the life God promises.

I stand here and look out, and I see what lies in our future, what God could do through this gathering and I can say with Paul,

I thank my God every time I remember you, 4 constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. -  
- Philippians 1:3-6

### **Communion**

Today, we observe communion to remember Jesus' death. We remember his body was broken so that we need not be broken by endless work. We remember that his blood was poured out for us so that we can pour ourselves into others, rather than what we produce.

We come to this table to remember that by participating in Jesus' death, we are crucifying our old slave selves. By participating in Jesus' death, we take the first halting steps in our race towards God's Promised Land, towards the day when even the scars left by Death's chains will be healed and we will be holy, perfect and blameless before God.