

Exodus 16:1-12, Exodus 17:1-7

Adventures in the Wilderness: God Provides (Subtitle: Pitch, Patience, Providence)

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### **Title Slide**

We continue our sermon series Adventures in the Wilderness.

Today we're looking at Exodus 16:1-12 & Exodus 17:1-7, listen now to God's word for us this day...

**Read Exodus 16:1-12, 17:1-7**

### **Scripture Slides**

#### **Title Slide**

#### **Let us Pray:**

Come, O Holy Spirit, come.

Come as the fire and burn,

Come as the wind and cleanse,

Come as the light and reveal,

Convict us, Convert us, Consecrate us...until we are wholly thine.

And now, Lord, my prayer is simply this:

That the words of my mouth

And the words of all our hearts will be found pleasing and acceptable to you,

for you are our rock and our redeemer...Amen.

#### **Sermon**

#### **[Slide – Pitch Experiment]**

What you see in front of you is a photo from *The Pitch Experiment*.

The Pitch Experiment has earned recognition as the world's longest running laboratory experiment by Guinness Book of World Records.

Started in 1927 by Professor Thomas Parnell of the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia.

Professor Parnell sought to demonstrate to students that some substances which appear to be solid are actually highly viscous.

So, he poured a heated sample of pitch into a sealed funnel and allowed it to settle for three years.

Pitch – you will recall – is a petroleum-based substance known for high viscosity & stickiness – it is what Noah used to waterproof the ark.

In 1930, he cut the seal at the neck of the funnel – allowing the pitch to start flowing.

Two years later the first drop formed – about the time most of Parnell’s students had graduated.

Then in December of 1938 the 1<sup>st</sup> drop fell.

The second fell about 8 years later in February 1947.

On average a drop fell once every 8 years until between the 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> – it took 12 years – when in November 2000 the 8<sup>th</sup> drop fell – the reason...they installed air-conditioning in the building housing the experiment which lowered the average temperature.

The ninth drop fell April 2014.

The photo you see on screen is taken from a livestream you can tune into to watch in real time – this has given rise to a group of people who call themselves “The 10<sup>th</sup> Watch” – people who view the livestream incessantly hoping and waiting to see the 10<sup>th</sup> pitch drop in real time. Considering the last pitch drop was April 2014 – and given the next pitch drop is slated to occur sometime in the next 14 years – this means the drop will most likely occur between 2020-2030.

In a moment, I’m going to snap my fingers and we’re going to go from still life photo to real life video – we’re going to cut to the livestream video from The University of Queensland’s webcam focused on *The Pitch Experiment*.

Ready...**[Snap Fingers] – cut to video or livestream – after two minutes or it ends go to title slide**

I can tell you – with a fair amount of certainty – that when we cut to the video – other than the change in time on the clock and possibly camera angle – this video will not change much during the time it is on screen.

So, I’m going to keep talking while this 60-120 second video plays.

They say watching the pitch experiment is as exciting as watching grass grow & paint dry – at .... The .... Same .... Time ....

As a people, generally, we are not good at waiting.

We want it and we want it now.

In college, I recall another experiment I learned about – it was either an intro to sociology or intro to psychology class – it is called the M & M Experiment – I’ve heard it also called the Marshmallow Experiment – the premise is this

Children in a room – on a plate on a table in front of them are 3 M & Ms (or 1 marshmallow)

They’re told if you wait 15 minutes without eating the food item, then we’ll double the item on the plate in front of you

Wait 15 minutes – you get 6 M & Ms

Wait 15 minutes – you get 2 marshmallows

Generally speaking, kids couldn't do it – they couldn't delay their gratification – they consumed the 3 M & Ms or 1 marshmallow – giving up the opportunity to double up the snack in front of them...

Generally, we don't like to wait – take our current life situation – we want things to go back to normal – to the way they were...

When can we jettison these masks

When can we stand closer than six feet to one another

When can we stop having to wash our hands with soap and water – or – use hand sanitizer (okay this last one is probably something we should never give up – it's just plain smart to wash your hands – hear that kids – wash your hands 😊).

We know that life doesn't necessarily return to normal as fast as we'd like it to –

That is if it ever will return to normal –

In fact – I'm beginning to identify with people who have shared with me following a loved one's death that the phrase "the new normal" doesn't work -

That makes sense to me because is there such a thing as "normal"

I'm beginning to think, 'no' - There is no normal

There is only right here = right now – the present circumstance – the present predicament - & how we move through such times...

As people of faith though we believe we are not going through this time alone – we are joined in the journey

by the God who provides – the God who saves – the God who sustains –  
the God who is the same – yesterday, today, & tomorrow –  
God The Father – God The Son – God The Holy Spirit

It involves, as Henri Nouwen puts it, [slide] waiting and patience – "A waiting person is a patient person. The word patience means the willingness to stay where we are and live the situation out to the full in the belief that something hidden there will manifest itself to us."

Which brings us to this morning's Wilderness Wandering texts.

Let's set the stage as to where the Israelites are right now in their wilderness wanderings...

**[Title slide]**

The people of Israel began complaining about the trials and tribulations of their liberation from Egypt even before it had been accomplished. In Exodus 14:10-12, the people panic when they

see the Egyptians pursuing them, and they bitterly ask Moses if he brought them out of Egypt just so they could die in the wilderness. And in Exodus 15:23-24, the people complain to Moses because the water at Marah is bitter, and in Exodus 16:2-3, they complain because of a lack of food.

Today's text (which portrays as one writer puts it "[another] gripe session") follows directly on the miraculous provision of bread from heaven ("manna," 16:1-36).

The Israelites haven't been in the wilderness long when today's story unfolds. According to the events described in Exodus 15 and 16, they've been in the wilderness about two and a half months.

They're encamped at an inhospitable place (which is what the biblical word wilderness designates). This place they're in is called Sin, an uncertain location related etymologically to the word Sinai.

From the wilderness of Sin, the "whole congregation" of the Israelites set out (v. 1). The Hebrew people are given various designations in the biblical text, the most common being simply "the people" (as throughout the current passage). The phrase used here — "the whole congregation" refers to the company of Israel of the exodus — it is a technical term found commonly in the Pentateuch [the first five books of OT — the books of Moses — Gen. / Ex. / Lev. / Numbers / Dt.]— it describes who have been delivered by the miraculous work of the Lord and, therefore, they are God's particular people.

Although the Hebrew word used to describe Israel here can mean simply a "group" or "circle" (e.g., Psalm 22:16), in the overwhelming majority of cases it has the religious connotation of those people uniquely and self-consciously related to the Lord.

The exact location of Israel's encampment, Rephidim, is unknown, and the fact that the company chose a location without water to rest (v. 1) suggests that the spot wasn't their preference; it's likely that circumstances — probably fatigue — determined the choice.

We know a thing or two — don't we — about fatigue - & finding ourselves in a spot that isn't our preference?

What do we do when that is where we find ourselves?

Priest & scientist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, might offer us some advice, he writes,

**[Slide – de Chardin quote]**

"Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

We are, quite naturally, impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability — and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you.

Your ideas mature slowly — let them grow, let them shape themselves, without undue haste.

Don't try to force them, as though you could be today what time (that is to say, grace and circumstances acting upon your own good will) will make you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be. Give Our Lord the benefit of believing that [the hand of God] is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete."

### **[Title Slide]**

What do we do in such circumstance?

Well, we could, like the Israelites move into complaint mode.

Why bring us this far — only to have us die — at least if we had stayed back in Egypt we would have food enough to eat?!

I offer another alternative.

It's an exercise that is both honest & hopeful.

In youth gatherings, we often check in with each other by sharing our joys and concerns.

Some call it, "Roses & Thorns."

We affectionately call it, "Happies & Crappies."

In our home we had a similar dinner ritual began when our son was in first grade, we would go around and share what was the best thing and worst thing that happened today or this week.

What we discovered in this practice was how to frame our prayers for one another — to be able to lift to God our gratitude & our anxious moments.

It doesn't discount our current predicament - & - it doesn't discount our hopeful anticipation that things can get better.

It's a bit prophetic if you take the basic definition of prophet into account — one who stands between God & the People declaring on behalf of the people to God "how it is" - & who declares on behalf of God to the people — "how it can be."

We never discount where we are — we embrace the reality — we stay honest.

We never discount where we might be going — we embrace the unknown — we stay hopeful.

As our recent General Assembly declared, we are a people who can faithfully move from lament into hope.

As one of our Presbyterian Creeds affirms, we believe, “In life & in death, we belong [heart and soul] to Almighty God.”

Perhaps you prefer the words of John Lennon who most likely borrowed from Christian mystic/theologian Julian of Norwich, **[slide with Julian of Norwich & John Lennon picture / with only words under Norwich picture ““All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well.”]**

Julian – it is of import to note – at age six lived through a Bubonic Plague – which was classified as the 1<sup>st</sup> and most severe manifestation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> pandemic – an event which killed nearly a 1/3 of Norwich, England’s population...

Capturing the intent of Julian of Norwich’s words, John Lennon, said,

**[slide with John Lennon’s words underneath his photo]**

“Everything will be okay in the end. If it is not okay, then it is not the end.”

In life & in death, we belong [heart and soul] to Almighty God...

The God who provides – the God who saves – the God who sustains –

The God who is the same – yesterday, today, & tomorrow –

God The Father – God The Son – God The Holy Spirit.

Alleluia & Amen!