Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, amen.

Last week we reflected upon the Ten Commandments that Israel receives in the Wilderness after their exodus from Egypt. The Ten Commandments are given very soon after leaving Egypt, within a month; but, not before the people complain about the lack of food. They lift their voices against God and Moses and recall the food pots in Egypt and all the bread they could eat. God is patient and provides them with Manna. They begin to complain again about the menu God has provided and He responds; “man shall not live by bread alone.” Then, God provides them meat in the form of birds to eat. All this takes place before arriving at Mt. Sinai where the Ten Commandments are given as Laws to live by; Laws to be obedient to.

We also remember that before Moses came down from Mt. Sinai with the Ten Commandments, the people had already constructed the Golden Calf as an object of worship in Moses’ absence. To put this into perspective, the Israelites build the idol only three months after the miracle of walking through the Red Sea on dry ground! In a short period of time, the people doubt God and His promise to bring them into the Promised Land.

The text today is at the end of the Wilderness experience and within five months[[1]](#footnote-1) of crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land. The people have trusted God, they have been fed, they are healthy, and they have multiplied. Still, they begin to grumble about the food God is providing and there is a price to pay. God will again teach them to be patient and point out their sin; this time He uses snakes!

Do you think it is a coincidence that God sends snakes? Our problems began with a serpent in the Garden of Eden, and here again, the snakes are present. By the way, the difference between a serpent and snake? Serpent is merely a formal word for snake; they are the same as snakes… and yes even vipers. So, in summary, the snake is a visual image of our sin that leads to death. This particular snake comes back and is destroyed. The people eventually begin to worship the bronze snake made by Moses and Hezekiah destroys it.

A few more details that people might not question. Why is the serpent make of bronze instead of any other substance. Great question! Of all that God commands, all the vessels, altars, pillars, and adornments that are outside of the temple are made of bronze; a metal made of combining copper and tin (vs. brass – copper and zinc). Bronze can be polished to a very brilliant shine much like brass. Gold was used only *within* the temple. Bronze also will not generate a spark with struck with another metal.

A few weeks ago, we share that our faith reveals that when we pray, we can believe that God has already heard our prayer and the Holy Spirit is already fulfilling that which God desires in our lives and in the lives of others. The people are not able to prayer to God for themselves, and so the ask Moses to pray on their behalf. Moses has a relationship with God and the people know it. Likewise, my friends, you also have a relationship with God and the unbelieving people know it. People believe in the power of your faith and prayers when they doubt the strength God has given them though their faith.

Jesus refers to the serpent (formal terminology) that Moses lifted up in the wilderness that brought life to the people. However, the sin must be identified for the life and healing to be extended. And herein lies the critical understanding; we must be mindful of sin so we will look in the right direction to the right sign. It is only when we are made aware of our sin do we look to the cross and to Christ for our forgiveness and for our life.

It is in love that our sin must be made known to us, which is possibly a concept that we will never comprehend until we feel the forgiveness that brings life. None of us like to be told we are wrong, and no one really wants to change. Israel is frustrated with wandering in the wilderness and they long for the well-prepared meals that include fine wines and the comfort of established homes. Year after year they have been eating the Bread of Heaven, which is given by God alone and sustains life. But they want more, and they are living in the wilderness with only the hope of a Promised Land.

We are Israel in so many ways my friends. We are impatient, we want more, we live in the Promises that God has made to us, and we remember a time when things were better without knowing that we were also dying. We know who God is, but we often doubt the Words that He offers because we encounter challenges that test our faith. We know that God loves us, but we cannot understand His love in the context of our fear, sorrow, grief, and pain. We are Israel in the wilderness who complains and fusses with God’s mercy and grace. We are Israel who in time will enter the Promised Land, only to fuss, complain, and doubt again.

God is faithful and God is just in all things; in our life, in the lives of our loved ones, and in the lives of those who we might consider our enemies. God is righteous and God is patient with us. However, in all things; God loves us beyond our understanding, knowledge, and limitations. God loves us to the point where He gave His Son (His Word) to the world (meaning us, others, and those we don’t know) at a time when we were still sinners so we might be saved.

God gave His Son, who was crucified and lifted up on a cross so we might look upon this Sacred and Divine life and receive life ourselves. God did not condemn us when Christ came into the world; He did not identify all our faults and sins on the cross. Rather the reality of a holy and pure life that suffered to defeat sin and the price of death is the image we will see forever on the cross. God uses love to bring us to the knowledge of our forgiveness and uses love to bring us home.

The sinful self we all possess will die in the wilderness because of the snakes and serpents that we have listened to and followed. However, like our Lord Jesus Christ, there is both a human side and a divine side to our life. The part that Christ has made holy within us will see and experience a new life that remains with our Lord forever.

We live in a world with snakes, serpents, and vipers that make known to us the sins we have committed and the doubts and deception they have planted in our life. And among all those snakes, serpents, and vipers is the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ that we look upon, for the peace that passes all understanding to keep our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord, now and forever. Amen.

1. https://www.julianspriggs.co.uk/Pages/WildernessChronology [↑](#footnote-ref-1)