



NEWSLETTER

BEACON

...guiding our walk

A Word From Pastor John

Lessons from the Wilderness

Our world can change overnight. Most of us have lived through a number of major world and national events that have turned our world upside-down and inside-out. We are all now living through one of those “inflection points” in history. We are in the midst of several crises, but none more transformative than the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are now moving into our fourth month of “sheltering in place” and practicing “social distance.” Church-life goes on, but it looks nothing like it did six months ago – as we continue “virtual” worship services online. “Gatherings” will gradually return, but with restrictions. We have no way to know how long it will take to return to “normal,” or even what that “new normal” will look like. We must not lose hope, because we can be confident in God’s providence that better days will return, eventually. That is the witness of scripture.

As I have been reflecting on these months of confinement, I keep being reminded that our foremothers and fathers also went through challenging times. Particularly, I am reminded of the Children of Israel, who, after being liberated from slavery in Egypt, had to wander in the desert wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula for forty years before they were permitted to enter the Promised Land of Canaan. Talk about being forced to “shelter in place” and “social distance!” Those forty years of confinement in the wilderness were certainly difficult for the Israelites. It was not what they expected when God led them to freedom. It was as if God was giving them a “time-out,” preparing them for the new beginning they would eventually have once their sojourn in the wilderness was over.

They certainly were frustrated with their confinement in the desert – the Old Testament books of Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are filled with stories of their grumbling and impatience. And yet, as we, the People of God, look back on those years of “sheltering in place,” we discover that those were not wasted years – God was at work, forming a people into the People of God, who would become a blessing to the whole world. Those “wilderness years” were among the most significant in the history of God’s people.

Continued

How does “The Wilderness Experience” bring about such transformation? Why did the prophets and mystics - and even Jesus himself - deliberately “social distance” for periods of time in the desert places? What was the draw – the appeal? Scripture itself gives us hints about what lonely periods in “the wilderness” mean to our faith journeys.

As we consider these passages of scripture, perhaps they may help us to think differently about our own COVID-19 “wilderness experience,” and how we can be transformed as we “social distance.” Consider what we might learn from these verses:

IN THE WILDERNESS, WE FEEL “SHUT IN”

Exodus 14:3 – *“For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, ‘They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.’”*

I’m sure by now, you are feeling “shut in.” Some of us are introverts, and enjoy the experience of being alone – separated from the crowd. Others are extroverts, and find confinement to be very challenging indeed. How are you doing in this time when “the wilderness has shut (you) in”?

IN THE WILDERNESS WE MAY FEEL THAT GOD HAS ABANDONED US – BUT HE KNOWS US AND IS WITH US, PROVIDING ALL WE NEED

Deuteronomy 2:7 – *“For the Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He knows you are going through this great wilderness. These forty years the Lord your God has been with you. You have lacked nothing.”*

Some of you may be feeling discouraged, wondering if God has turned his back on us, allowing us to go through all these trials and difficulties alone. We are going through nothing as taxing as the Israelites endured. Reread this verse, and take comfort that, even in the wilderness, God knows your plight, is with you in the midst of your difficulties, and promises to provide you with all you need to see this through.

EVEN IN THE WILDERNESS, GOD FINDS US, ENCIRCLES US, AND CARES FOR US. WE ARE “THE APPLE OF HIS EYE”

Deut. 32:9-10 – *“But the Lord’s portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage. He found him in a desert land, and in the howling waste of the wilderness; he encircled him, he cared for him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.”*

Have you ever thought of yourself as “the apple of (God’s) eye”? This is a play on words in Hebrew – “apple” = “little man,” as in “seeing yourself reflected in the pupil of God’s eye,” meaning you are under God’s watch-care. When you get discouraged in your time alone, remember that you are not alone – God himself is seeing your need and looking out for you!

OUT OF OUR WILDERNESS EXPERIENCES, WHEN THE WAY SEEMS ROUGH, GOD CAN STRAIGHTEN OUT OUR PATHS

Matthew 3:3 – *“For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’” (also see Isaiah 40:3)*

Both Isaiah and John the Baptist share the insight that, even in wilderness seasons of our lives, God can “straighten” our paths. Have you ever had that experience? It is often in the most distressing and confusing periods of our lives, our wilderness wanderings, that God intervenes and straightens out our “paths.” What path is God wanting to straighten out in your life, as a result of this time in the wilderness? Will you let him do it?

Continued

LIKE THE PROPHETS OF OLD, JESUS WENT INTO THE WILDERNESS SO HE COULD BETTER HEAR GOD

Mark 1:12-13 - *The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.* At the very beginning of his ministry, before Jesus had even preached his first sermon, Jesus felt the Spirit of God “driving him” into the wilderness where he fasted and prayed. Why? So he could listen intently to his Father, and hear what God was asking him to do. We often want to rush into decisions and courses of action because we think we know what is best – only to discover that we made a mess of things. How much better would things turn out if we took the time to seek “alone time” with God, so that we might hear his voice speak. We can’t do that if we are distracted by the world. Use this time as your “wilderness” place where you can hear God’s “still small voice” speak into your life.

GOD WILL ‘MAKE A WAY’ THROUGH THIS WILDERNESS – IN THE PROCESS, HE IS DOING A NEW THING IN US – WHAT?

Isaiah 43:19 – *“Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.”*

As we move through this COVID-19 season of our lives, what “new thing” does God want to birth in us? - in our church? - in our society? Do you see new “rivers” beginning to flow in your life or our society that promise to bring new life and new beginnings? Can you perceive what God is doing?

IN THE WILDERNESS, WE KNOW OUR LIMITATIONS, WE MUST RELY ON GOD TO PROVIDE

Exodus 15:22 - *Then Moses made Israel set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water.*

We take so much for granted when we are in comfortable places. Life seems so easy and natural that we assume we are self-sufficient – that we have provided for our own needs – when in fact, we are totally dependent on God. This is the real reason the Israelites had to wander in the wilderness for forty years – they had to be taught to put their whole trust in God. After they went a period without water, God provided them water. After they went without food, God provided them manna and quail. If they were to be God’s People, they must learn to trust God, and the wilderness was their classroom. Do we fully trust God to provide? Perhaps this time of social distancing is to teach us to trust God more.

And finally, a passage that I think summarizes beautifully what we must learn during our wilderness season:

GOD ALLOWS US TO STAY IN THE WILDERNESS TO HUMBLE US, TEST OUR FAITHFULNESS TO HIS WORD IN OUR LIVES, AND TEACH US TO RELY MORE ON HIM

Deuteronomy 8:2-3 – *“And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”*

These are only a few of the wonderful passages in the Bible that remind us to treasure the wilderness periods in our lives and in our faith journeys, because they can be the most productive seasons in helping us grow in our spiritual maturity – if we will take advantage of the opportunity. How are you using this time-apart to grow closer to God?

I love being your pastor!

Pastor John

JUST A NOTE FROM MEGAN MASH

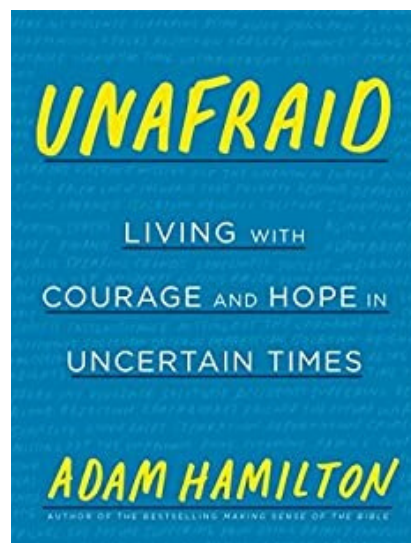
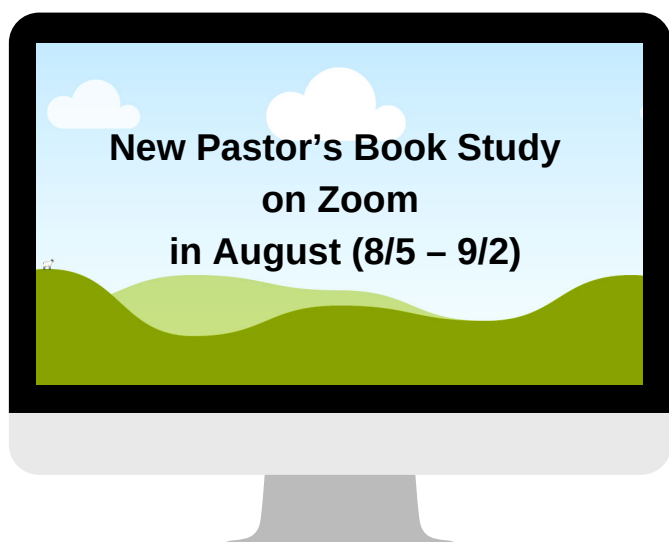


Charles Wesley is one of the most noted hymn writers in history and of all his hymns "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" is one of his most well known. The hymn first appeared in four stanzas in *Hymns for those that seek and those that have Redemption in the Blood of Jesus Christ* published in 1747. Some of Wesley's inspiration to write this text undoubtedly comes from John Dryden's poem used by Henry Purcell in his opera *King Arthur*. The poem begins with the words "Fairest Isle, all isles Excelling/Seat of Pleasures, and of Loves;/Venus here will chuse her Dwelling,/And forsake her Cyprian Groves." The inspiration is made clearer when John Wesley set the text to a Purcell tune when it was published in 1761 in the Wesleys' collection *Sacred Melody*.

This hymn has two tunes that are commonly associated with it, BEECHER and HYFRYDOL. Our hymnal uses BEECHER which was written in 1870 by John Zundel specifically for the text "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling." The tune is named after Henry Ward Beecher who was pastor at Plymouth Congregational Church in Brooklyn where Zundel joined the staff in 1847. The tune was first published in Zundel's collection *Christ Heart Songs* in 1870. In this book the composer provided an index with the appropriate tempo for each tune. According to the index, one time through BEECHER is supposed to take sixty-five seconds! This is a much slower tempo than we are used to singing this tune. Modern day congregations sing this tune about twice as fast as Zundel indicated!

Now what you have been waiting, the actual text! The first stanza is a plea for Jesus to dwell in our hearts, "fix in us thy humble dwelling/all thy faithful mercies crown!... visit us with thy salvation;/enter every trembling heart." Wesley emphasizes the fact that when Jesus dwells in our hearts he calms our spirit. Knowing that Jesus is with us makes the joyous moments of life more joyous and provides strength to endure the sorrowful moments of life. The second stanza has been problematic since Wesley penned it. Many hymnals omit the stanza all together. The problem comes halfway through. The original stanza reads "Take away our power of sinning." The question becomes can God take away our power of sinning without taking away our free will/obedience? John Wesley also had a problem with this line and omitted it from their hymnals. To still use the second stanza many hymnal committees opted to change this line. Our hymnal reads "Take away our bent to sinning." This is asking for Jesus to help us not sin while still leaving plenty of room for free will. I think this is a great compromise. This way we get the beginning of the stanza that asks for the Spirit to comfort us and reminds us of our inheritance in heaven. The end of the stanza also asks for comfort as well as reminding us that God is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. The third stanza asks for God's help to keep us in God's presence. In God's presence we find true life and can continuously praise God. "Come, Almighty to deliver,/let us all thy life receive;/...Thee we would be always blessing;/serve thee as thy hosts above,/pray and praise thee without ceasing." The fourth stanza sends us out to the world as new creation. It begins, "Finish, then, thy new creation;/pure and spotless let us be." Asking for God to finish the new creation is very interesting. It implies that while our lives can be radically changed by God, becoming a new creation is a process. We must be patient to endure the race placed before us. The hymn text ends like most Wesley texts by getting us to heaven. While heaven might be the final resting place we still have work to do on earth. The line "till in heaven we take our place," encourages us to take seriously the call placed on our life on earth.

Overall this hymn encourages us to praise God without ceasing and spread the good news to those around us while still on earth.



Currently, a group of us are reading an excellent book and coming together every Wednesday at 10 am on Zoom to discuss what we are reading.

In August, the Pastor's Book Club will be reading a very timely book by Adam Hamilton, entitled **Unafraid: Living with Courage and Hope in Uncertain Times**. It deals with such topics as - Pt. 1: Understanding and Countering Fear; Pt. 2: Crime, Race, Terrorism, and Politics; Pt. 3: Failure, Disappointing Others, Insignificance, and Loneliness; Pt. 4: Apocalypse, Change, Missing Out, and Finances; Pt. 5: Aging, Illness, Dying, and "Fear of the Lord."

We are living in frightening times. Why not join our book study to help you deal with "fear" in your life? Order your own copy of the book (available online widely), and let Pastor John know (johngillumc@bellsouth.net) that you want to participate.

(Note: The Acts Bible Study on Zoom will resume on Tuesday, beginning Aug. 4.)

We Need a Membership Care Team at SUMC

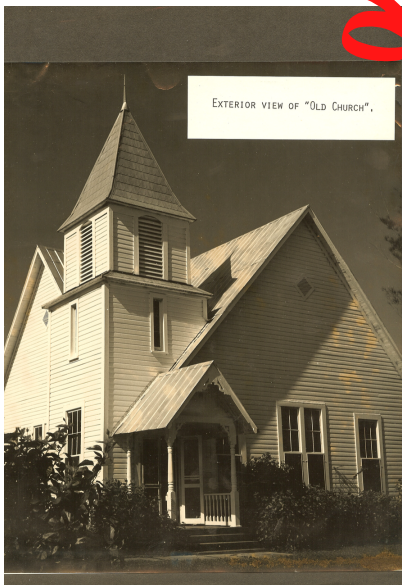
One of the gaps in the ministry of our congregation is Membership Care. It isn't that no one is caring for members – many people do reach out to folks on their own. It's just that we don't have a coordinated and ongoing outreach to our home-bound, aging, or infirmed members. We need a small group of folks who will coordinate this effort. Let Pastor John know if you feel called to this ministry of concern (johngillumc@bellsouth.net). Thanks.



ARE YOU INTERESTED IN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION?

Pastor John has recently been named the Commissioner of the Atlantic Central District of the UMC, representing the District on the Commission of Archives and History for the Florida Conference of the UMC. This Commission is dedicated to preserving and publicizing the heritage of the churches of the Florida Conference. Pastor John will be working with all congregations of the District to ensure that they have a "church historian" who will help archive the heritage of their congregation for future generations. Currently, Sebastian UMC does not have a "historian." Would you be interested in taking on that role? Contact Pastor John (johngillumc@bellsouth.net) if you would like to help! Also, each District has two Commissioner positions. The second slot is currently not filled. Pastor John would appreciate someone from our church to consider being a co-Commissioner for our District, working as a team. Contact him if you would be interested and willing.

Thanks



EXTERIOR VIEW OF "OLD CHURCH".

Original Church, faces RR tracks
on Louisiana Avenue

Tear Down getting ready to
build new church



New Church 1964



Thursday Meditation

9 a.m. - 11 a.m.

Come & Go in the Sanctuary

Meditation clears your mind.

It frees it from the disorder of
everyday living.

Friends,

The worship committee continues to be methodical and careful about planning activities for us to gather together in person again. We want to offer you an opportunity for personal prayer and meditation in the sanctuary. This will begin on Thursday, July 2 from 9-11am and will happen weekly. This is a come and go time of prayer. There will be prayer prompts available or you can use your time for your personal prayers.

You need to wear either a mask or face shield. You will be asked to use hand sanitizer or wash your hands before entering the sanctuary. We also ask that you refrain from talking while in the sanctuary. This a time for prayer, not socializing. We need a couple volunteers each week to be a greeters and sanitizers. If you are interested in helping, please let Megan or John know.

We thank you again for your patience and understanding as we continue to monitor the status of COVID-19 in our community and discern the safest path for our congregation. We are working on plans for in person Sunday morning worship and when we have those details together we will let you know.

In Christ,
The Worship Committee



*Hands of God...we can be the hands of God...
Voice of God...we can be the voice of God...!
Let us speak kind words like God and lend a helping
hand...*

*Let us make the choice, dear God...
Let us sing your Praise, dear God...
Let us do Your Will, dear God....
Let us spread Your Peace...!*

*Let us be Your Hands, dear God...
Let us be Your Voice, dear God...
Let us lend an ear, dear God...
Let us spread Your Love...!*

Nancy L Fox June 22, 2020

10 a.m. - 12 p.m.

BRING YOUR LAWN CHAIR, YOUR OWN FOOD & DRINK
THERE WILL BE BOTTLED WATER AVAILABLE



JULY 11 GATHERING RIVERVIEW PARK

RSVP if you plan on
attending or even undecided.
Call church office. Thanks
for helping us plan