

## **BUMC Weekly Bible and Sermon Study**

**Sermon:** “Living In-Between” (from the “Deliverance” sermon series)

**Scripture:** Exodus 15:22-27 (The Waters of Marah and Elim)

### **Key take-aways from the Scripture**

- In this section of Exodus, we find Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt and into the wilderness of an area called Shur. The word Shur means “wall” and its exact location is not known but some scholars point to the northern part of the Sinai Peninsula.
- They went three days in this wilderness and found no water. They came to the area called Marah, which means “bitter.” Here, the water was too bitter to drink, so they complained against Moses.
- There, the Lord led Moses to a piece of wood and he was instructed to throw it into the water, which then became sweet enough to drink. It is interesting to note that the piece of wood was not magical or supernatural in itself (similar to Moses and Aaron’s staff when confronting Pharaoh in chapter 7 or Moses’ staff parting the water of the Red Sea in chapter 14), but a symbol of God’s miracle for His people.
- What follows, in verses 25-26, is a test by God of the Israelites in the form of a conditional law or ordinance: “If you will listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in his sight, and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians; for I am the LORD who heals you.” The diseases mentioned in verse 26 may refer to the plagues, specifically to boils (9:8-12). For further into these verses, see also Deuteronomy 28:27; Hosea 7:1; and 14:4.
- Finally, verse 27 mentions that they “came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees; and they camped there by the water.” This area is about seven miles south of Marah and often identifies with Wadi Gharandel, south of Hawwarah. This is where God provides healthy water to all of the Israelites during their wandering in the wilderness. Traditions from the nomadic Bedouin tribe speak of flash flood waters, similar to what occurred at the Red Sea in Exodus 14, in this region.

### Key take-aways from the Sermon

- Sacred literature becomes liturgy for the people of God! It is why we have anthems, orchestras, and sing hymns on Sunday. It is our way of participating and engaging in the ongoing redemptive story of God's deliverance of God's people.
- The oldest lyric in the Old Testament is a refrain in Exodus 15:21 from Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron. The intervention of God always brings about music and poetry. We think from here this will conclude with a "happy ending" for those fleeing, but it does not turn out that way.
- The pathway between bondage and promise leads directly into the wilderness for the Israelites.
- Wilderness state: trials and challenges that each of us experience in life as part of our journey. God is always leading us...even in this wilderness state. It is a place of uncertainty, like the desert. The wilderness or desert is a place "in between." In between promise and fulfillment. Biblically speaking, it is a place of "transition."
- Wilderness is a "season of liminality." *Liminal* is from the Latin word meaning threshold or waiting area. It is a place of waiting or being in between something.
- This is a place where transformation happens! The Bible is very clear that we cannot bypass the wilderness/liminal in life.
- Life is *liminal*...each of us are experiencing a struggle or challenge in life. However, God is in the wilderness with us. This is where trust is deepened, and identity is confirmed. Grace is enough for our need. The entire Bible is an invitation to liminality, in between the world and the world yet to come.
- "There is a sweet spot between the known and the unknown where *originality* happens; the key is to be able to linger there without *panicking*." -Ed Catmull
- In the wilderness, God can make the bitter water sweet. Even in our difficult times and unsure of the future, God is always with us and we know He holds the future.
- Psalm 16:8: The Lord is *before* me...at my right hand. Because God is before us and at our right hand, we need not be shaken or afraid. We can always be steady...even in the wilderness.
- In the wilderness, God is there re-inventing, restoring and renewing our lives for a new life of purpose and mission so that we might become a part of the liturgy of God, for the purpose of mission, so that our life might become a poem/song that celebrates the goodness and grace of the One who renews us...even in the wilderness.

### Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

- What were your key take-aways from the sermon? How can you apply this to your everyday life?
- We have read about the Israelite's complaining in chapters 14 and 15. What do you think is the difference between *complaining* about a difficult situation and *lamenting* to God about a difficult situation?
- This section of Exodus marks a transition for the Israelites. They have moved from an enslaved people in Egypt to a liberated people of God. During this transition, the Israelites face a challenging new life in the wilderness (Rev. Dr. Chappell refers to this as a "season of liminality").
  - Reflect on times in your life when you were in transition and felt that you were in the "wilderness." How have you felt God's presence during these times? In what ways did you feel loved and nourished by others during these times? How did you get through it?



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## NOTES

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