

***Are We There Yet?* (Exodus 15:22-25a; 16:2-4; 17:1-6; Numbers 14:1-9)**

**Rev. Todd Pridemore**

**First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, MO**

**August 7, 2022**

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Pausing with each other to participate in the ritual of the Lord's Supper together is important for many reasons. One of the most important is the opportunity for us to really be honest... Honest with ourselves, honest with God, and honest with each other. This morning we've been reminded of the enormity of God's bounty. God is more than enough, and God is always more than enough. But sometimes – maybe often in life – God's enormous bounty seems hidden or distant. And sometimes it's hard to be honest about that.

In a few minutes we're going to look at a long, drawn out story in the Old Testament of the Bible where God's people had several moments of "being honest." Their honesty wasn't very encouraging, and some might say it's really kind of disappointing. As we'll see, there was a lot of "complaining" – some Bible translations use the word "grumbling" - because their expectations weren't being met. It seemed as if God let them down. But we'll get to that in a moment.

This morning I'm going to be honest, and I'm going to grumble a little bit. Our congregation has been without a Senior Pastor for a long, LONG time. I asked Mary in the church office to help me with the timeline of just how long it's been since our previous pastor, Doyle Sager preached his last sermon. This is the timeline of who has preached on Sunday mornings...

- Doyle Sager's last sermon: August 2, 2020 [735 days ago]
- Melissa Hatfield, Hannah Coe & Others: August 9, 2020 - May 23, 2021
- Transitional Supply Preachers: May 30, 2021 - August 8, 2021
- Keith Herron, Intentional Interim: August 15 - July 24, 2022

And in my honest grumbling about all of this, I expected that when Keith preached his last sermon here, that we would have a new Lead Pastor hired and following right behind him. But that's not what happened – and that's no fault of Keith's. I'm disappointed because my expectation wasn't met. But here we are.

We know that constant grumbling and being disappointed doesn't get us anywhere. It only makes us more negative and puts us in a place where we then easily miss God's bounty – again we'll read about that in a minute. So I do want to offer you some encouragement today regarding our search for our next Lead Pastor. Because if you're like me, you've been wondering for a while "Are We There Yet?" or maybe more specifically, "When Are We Going To Get There?" when it comes to calling a new Lead Pastor.

As Cari Collins, the Chair of the Pastor Search Committee has stated before, we can't give you a date yet. But I will share this illustration with you: This past spring break, my family did something we had never done before. We decided to drive to Colorado and go skiing. We

drove, and it was a LONG drive. Carolyn's and my boys are old enough to know that constantly whining "Are We There Yet?" from the back seats never helps anything. As the miles passed and the hours in the van slowly ticked by, we were all getting pretty tired of the whole journey. Then, when it seemed like we couldn't wait any longer, someone spotted the first snow-capped mountain peak in the distance. We weren't there yet, but the destination was in sight! We were getting closer! We knew that the journey wasn't going to last forever.

That's where we are in the pastor-search process. We aren't to our destination yet, but we can see it in the distance. You never know if a tire might blow out unexpectedly or road construction will create an unforeseen delay, but we're getting closer. Hang in there. Don't give up. Because just like my family was so thankful after we endured the long journey to get to the ski slopes in Colorado, we will all rejoice together when finally find and call the next Lead Pastor for our congregation.

And with the ski slopes of Colorado in mind, I invite you to join me in looking at a different kind of journey that God's people took in the Old Testaments books of Exodus and Numbers. As we think about this story together, let's pay attention to the things that can prevent us from seeing and experiencing the future that God has in store for us – the things that trap us and can distract us on our own journey. We're going to start in the second book of the Bible, Exodus...

And it's important to know the background of this story: God's people, the nation of Israel, had been slaves in Egypt under the rule of Pharaoh for many long years. And now, God had finally freed them! Moses had just parted the Red Sea, and the Egyptian army was now safely behind them.

#### **Exodus 15:22-25a**

<sup>22</sup> Then Moses ordered Israel to 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. <sup>23</sup> When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter. That is why it was called Marah. <sup>24</sup> And the people complained against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" <sup>25</sup> He cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood; he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet.

- It's easy to miss or lose track of the future God has in store for us when our circumstances get tough... when our expectations aren't met.

#### **Exodus 16:2-4**

<sup>2</sup> The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup> The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and ate our fill of bread, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

<sup>4</sup> Then the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not.

- It's easy to miss the future that God has in store when we become consumed with trying to recapture the past.
- When it comes to our search for a new Pastor: We can't live in the past, and we can't go back and replicate the past. Just as the Israelites wished they could turn back to the stability of their lives in Egypt, we sometimes want to do the same in church life. But we can't and we shouldn't.

### **Exodus 17:1-6**

**17** From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. <sup>2</sup>The people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" <sup>3</sup>But the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?"

<sup>4</sup>So Moses cried out to the Lord, "What shall I do for this people? They are almost ready to stone me." <sup>5</sup>The Lord said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile and go. <sup>6</sup>I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.

- I wonder why God kept waiting for the people to cry out before they were provided for. There may have been some reasons that had to do with their behavior, but I think it also had a lot to do with the lesson God was trying to drive home to them: God provides for them. They can't provide for themselves. Only God. And because only God can provide what they need, they should be very careful not to look to others, when the One they should look to is God.

So we move to the final passage we'll read this morning... God has brought the nation of Israel to the edge of the much anticipated "Promised Land." A few spies had gone ahead to scout out the land, and most of them returned shaking in their boots, discouraged. Because the land that was finally in sight, that was within their reach, was inhabited by a group of large, imposing natives.

### **Numbers 14:1-9**

**14** Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. <sup>2</sup>And all the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron; the whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! <sup>3</sup>Why is the Lord bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" <sup>4</sup>So they said to one another, "Let us choose a captain and go back to Egypt."

<sup>5</sup>Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the Israelites. <sup>6</sup>And Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes <sup>7</sup>and said to all the congregation of the Israelites,

“The land that we went through as spies is an exceedingly good land. <sup>8</sup> If the Lord is pleased with us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. <sup>9</sup> Only, do not rebel against the Lord, and do not fear the people of the land, for they are no more than bread for us; their protection is removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them.”

- “Do not fear.” This is the most repeated message in the Bible. And it’s fear that prevents God’s people from moving forward and experiencing the bountiful future that God has in store for them in this moment. Fear is also a very active adversary in our lives – as individuals and as a church. As we continue our search for a Pastor, many of us have feelings of fear. But we cannot allow our fear of the unknown to become bigger than our faith in God.

IN CONCLUSION, don’t forget that in our journey together we can miss the bountiful future that God has in store when...

1. We allow tough challenges to distract us from the truth that God always provides. Life is often hard, but the fact that it’s hard doesn’t mean we’re on the wrong path.
2. We get caught up in trying to recapture or live in the past. The past simply won’t fit into the future.
3. We try to provide for ourselves, instead of relying on God to provide. Everything is in God’s hands.
4. And finally, when we allow fear to overcome our faith. More than anything else, fear is what prevents us from experiencing all that God wants for us.