

Worship in the Wilderness

Second Sunday

Read: Exodus 15:22-27

22Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water. 23When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.) 24So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What are we to drink?" 25Then Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became fit to drink. There the Lord issued a ruling and instruction for them and put them to the test. 26He said, "If you listen carefully to the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you." 27Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water.

Some thoughts:

How would you rate your church's Sunday worship? Do you love the music in your services, the ways people pray and celebrate communion, the attempts at creativity, testimony and reflection? Perhaps if you are honest, sometimes you struggle, disagree with the way things are presented, or find yourself thinking "I would be able to worship far better if they led the worship the way I like it!"

It is easy to think that we will worship better if we have more - better music, a more spiritual pastor, a louder PA system, a newer projector screen. Or perhaps you lament the loss of older forms of worship- the hymns or prayer book you were so familiar with, the quiet reflection you used to experience. None of these things are bad in and of themselves. In fact they are all gifts from God. But if we depend on them to make our worship happen we're going to be in for a surprise.

Reflection:

Are there some things you rely on before you will worship?

God told Moses in Exodus 7 to demand of Pharaoh that the people of Israel may be set free to go and worship in the wilderness. He wanted to teach them to worship, not by adding more, but by taking things away. In the wilderness they could rely on nothing other than his presence with them. Songwriter Michael Card has reflected:

" True worship begins in the wilderness. Praise is almost always the answer to a plea that arises in the desert... In the wilderness the children of Israel discovered

that above all others, He was worthy. He was the Father they wanted. He was the Provider they needed." Michael Card, *A Scared Sorrow*, pages 23-24.

Is there a desert in your life? Perhaps your church services have felt dry or difficult for you. Maybe your family or relationships are seeming like a bit of a wilderness, or your work life is a barren place right now. It could be that all the outer things are fine, but inside, in your spirit, you are going through a wasteland, a "dark night of the soul".

Reflection:

Note down any situations which feel like a wilderness to you at the moment.

The good news is this: God has not abandoned you in the wilderness. In fact, he allows his people to go through times of dryness so that they will see that it is he who provides and be more aware of his presence. He wants you to call out to him in the wilderness so that he might provide the water of life you need, and so that you might worship him from your heart.

Rest: Take a moment in quiet to acknowledge God's presence with you.