

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
Numbers 21:4-9  
May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2012

“A few” words from the Word of the Lord in the Old Testament text for this 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, “*And the people became impatient... And they spoke against God and against Moses, ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness... There is no food, no water and we loathe this worthless food.’*” Happy Mother’s Day.

Perhaps you might be thinking such a text wrought with anger and discontent does not belong with a blessed day like this one. I believe it does. These words fit well a day like today because such words fit us. Angry words are familiar, if you are a mother, a parent... or if you have cared for anyone. Discontent is familiar if you are a mother, a parent... or if you have cared for anyone. No, these are not the “touchy/feely” words of Mother’s Day... but mothers are familiar with them. Rather, these are real words of Easter. And God has a way of taking words such as these... our words... and doing something about it. And it just so happens... whether on Mother’s Day or not... He does just that. How He does it, is in the Old Testament text appointed for this 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter.

In the text are words that come against God and Moses out of the depths of discontent. The children of Israel were suffering and they blamed those in charge. I mean, that’s what happens when suffering and disillusion occur. And, if you are like me, you have heard these words and put yourself in the shoes of those Israelites, wandering around in the desert, with food they hate, so very uncomfortable, with their whole family traveling from place to place, nowhere to call home, and said to yourself, “I don’t blame them one bit – that’s what I would have said.”

But just because we can understand it – and would have probably said it or done it ourselves, doesn’t mean that it was the right thing to do. It was wrong, and the Lord disciplined, “In Divine Love,” His children for the way they were acting. Now I want to emphasize to you, this is not a Mother’s Day sermon, though I mentioned Mother’s Day – and this happens to be that very day. We do have to admit that God, in His parental action, did what a good mother would have done. A good mother, like God did, when their children act up, should send venomous snakes to bite them. Wait a minute – What? What kind of parent would do that? What kind of God do we have?

Answer: a loving God. Can you believe that the snake bites in the desert were a result of God’s love for His people? We might find that hard to believe, but it is true. Here is what we know. We know God loves His people. Back in Numbers 14:18 it says, “*The Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression...*” We also know God sent snakes among the people and they bit the people. God sent the snakes to bite the people He already said He loved. Strange, right? – but true. We do have to realize, beloved in the Lord, that the effect of what happened was the result God desired – the reason why the snakes were put into action in the first place. It says, “*And the people came to Moses and said, ‘We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you.’*”

Beloved, that’s the desire of God for us – to say those very words – to admit who we are – and to amend our sinful lives. The children of God realized their sin and they turned from their sinful ways. God’s law has us look into a mirror. We hear those words of the Ten Commandments and we measure ourselves against them. Have I treated God as the most important in my life? Have I used His name in my life in the right way? Have I kept the time He has given me to worship the way He so desires? Have I honored those God has given me to honor? Have I stolen, hurt someone else or even thought of hurting them in any way? Have I committed sexual sins of any kind? Do I covet what doesn’t belong to me or speak ill of my

neighbor? Have we said yes to any of them? Better put and more accurate – we said yes to all of them. The law is a mirror that shows us our sins. We can thank God that the law we have is not snakes. Though we deserve to be snake-bitten, our deceitful deeds do come back to bite us.

But look at how our Lord, “Does something about it” (like mentioned earlier). He told Moses to make a snake and put it on a pole and when they looked at the serpent on the pole, they lived. I promise you, beloved, that God had you in mind when these strange events of grumbling, biting and healing took place in a desert somewhere between captivity in Egypt and freedom in the Promise Land. This very situation would be a commentary on the life God would grant to you, by placing His very Son Jesus – who came to be like the snakes that we are in every way, except without sin – and was placed on a pole to bleed and die. And now, as God’s people look upon that bloody cross where the snake with all our sin – the perfect snake who was then carrying every bit of our venomous sin upon Himself – we see our salvation. It is before our very eyes.

The serpent on a pole in the desert was the Son on a pole – on a cross – at Calvary. The children, who looked upon that serpent, who were tainted with poison in their bodies and about to die are you, the children of our Lord who, poisoned with sin, about to die to eternal death in those sins, looked upon the Son on a pole at Calvary, believe and live.

Here we are, beloved in the Lord, out in the desert of our lives wondering why God has us where we are right now. We believe in what we say, much like the Israelites said, “*Back in Egypt, we sat around pots of meat and had our fill. Why didn’t you just leave us in Egypt where at least we had a place to die.*” All the while they were quick to forget that they were slaves in a land that was not their own. The children of Israel did not know why they had to be out in that desert for as long as they were. But God had great plans for His people. We, perhaps, do not know or understand why God has us where we are right now. If we attempt to guess, we often miss the mark altogether. But we can be assured of this. God is still God – in the desert of your life or in the Promise Land. God is still your God who makes serpents to put on poles to save His people – no matter where they are.

Sometimes words like “Happy” as in, “Happy Mother’s Day” don’t really describe your mood. “Happy” may not be your mood on Mother’s Day. Rather, they describe a desire for you to be blessed on such a day like today. You can be blessed and not happy. You can be loved and forgiven and snake bitten. You know as well as I do that life is made up of a whole host of “both/ands” and not “either/ors.”

So what do we do? We keep looking up toward the bronze serpent – that is, the blessed Son of Righteousness. This place is a place of looking up for snake bitten Christians. This is the place where God’s children kneel before the Lord and receive what God has in store for His faithful – and we have it. This is the place where snake bitten Christians have life and that announcement of the forgiveness of all of our sins. Be not dismayed, brothers and sisters in Christ our Lord. The Lord redeems His people – not through a bronze image but by the actual suffering and death of our Savior. And because He lives, our Easter celebration continues. Because He lives so do us. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.