

03.23.25 ~ Lent 3

**“The Hospitality of the Desert”**

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

**Psalm 63** <sup>NIV</sup>

*A psalm of David. When he was in the Desert of Judah.*

- <sup>1</sup> You, God, are my God,  
earnestly I seek you;  
I thirst for you,  
my whole being longs for you,  
in a dry and parched land  
where there is no water.
- <sup>2</sup> I have seen you in the sanctuary  
and beheld your power and your glory.
- <sup>3</sup> Because your love is better than life,  
my lips will glorify you.
- <sup>4</sup> I will praise you as long as I live,  
and in your name I will lift up my hands.
- <sup>5</sup> I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods;  
with singing lips my mouth will praise you.
- <sup>6</sup> On my bed I remember you;  
I think of you through the watches of the night.
- <sup>7</sup> Because you are my help,  
I sing in the shadow of your wings.
- <sup>8</sup> I cling to you;  
your right hand upholds me.
- <sup>9</sup> Those who want to kill me will be destroyed;  
they will go down to the depths of the earth.
- <sup>10</sup> They will be given over to the sword  
and become food for jackals.
- <sup>11</sup> But the king will rejoice in God;  
all who swear by God will glory in him,  
while the mouths of liars will be silenced.

**Leader: These Words of Protection Are from God.**

**People: Thanks be to God!**

**1 Corinthians 10:1-13** <sup>NIV</sup>

*Warnings From Israel's History*

- <sup>1</sup> For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. <sup>2</sup> They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. <sup>3</sup> They all ate the same spiritual food <sup>4</sup> and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.
- <sup>6</sup> Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. <sup>7</sup> Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: “The

people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.”<sup>8</sup> We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died.<sup>9</sup> We should not test Christ, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes.<sup>10</sup> And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.

<sup>11</sup> These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. <sup>12</sup> So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! <sup>13</sup> No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

**Leader: These Reassuring Words of Paul Are of God.**

**All: Thanks be to God!**

**Please pray with me:**

Dear Lord, comforter, rescuer, protector, and guide, we ask you to fill our hearts and minds with your words of assurance and direction. We appreciate our time spent with you and each other during the week and already today. We gather again to worship you in fellowship, praise, and wonder, despite our burdens and concern for our country, the world, and ourselves. You are sovereign. Help us to hear **your** message of hope, as we clear our minds to receive your guidance and mercy. May **your** voice renew, refresh, and strengthen us for the weeks to come. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

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Happy Spring! Yes, it is official, plus you probably noticed last week the blooming daffodils and this week that some trees were trimmed around the church property. The flower beds still need some work, but as it probably is at your home, the gardens are a work in progress. For Easter, we must put in our flower order this week, so if you could get your lily and tulip orders in, that would be helpful. No obligation of course.

As we continue our journey through the Lenten season, the desert seemed a good place to explore. Many denominations choose to fast during this time leading up to Easter, remembering Jesus forty days in the actual desert and the devil’s temptation of food, drink, and supreme power. In our psalm, according to tradition, King David expresses his

spiritual desert while he fled from Saul and his enemies to the actual desert of Judea. Later scholarship suggests that the timing fits more closely to his escape into the desert from Absalom, his son who rebelled against him in a war where Absalom was killed and David eventually returned to the throne (2 Samuel 13-19).

For our purposes of study today, let's talk about deserts. Biblically, the desert or wilderness represents a place of trial, testing, transformation, and often a divine encounter. For some, deserts are isolating places for meditation and introspection, becoming symbols of spiritual awakenings and enlightenment. Not far from the Wadi Qelt photo on the bulletin cover is a contemplative monastery, St. George's Greek Orthodox community, built into the side of isolated desert cliffs for reflection, but now offers hospitality to hikers and visitors. The cliff on the bulletin cover towers above a stream and small oasis.

We think of deserts symbolically as a time period of difficulty or discernment, and often it is. The desert we travelled through in Israel was harsh, dry, rocky, with few animals, humans or vegetation. It was hot and inhospitable to build communities; however, it was also a place of grandeur, simplicity, some growth, and discovery. On the bulletin cover, those openings were for shelter, and if you look very carefully, you'll see some pastors on our tour climbing up there to look inside. Arid regions are defined as having less than 10 inches of precipitation a year. Biblical deserts averaged 113 degrees Fahrenheit on summer days and below freezing on winter nights. Shepherding of sheep and goats was the primary occupation, and survival was never guaranteed.

Yet, as we see with David and even Moses, the desert was a place of refuge from oppression, for renewal, discernment, and for God's revelation. For David, thirsting for God was both physical and spiritual. He had witnessed God's glory in the ark and felt God's presence in the Jerusalem tabernacle. So, after being chased into the wilderness, he craves God's presence and reassurance and writes about it. So should we! He decided to praise God even in the desert, overlooking his threatening situation. This is a message for us and for all generations. He and we need God's safety, protection, and divine intervention. Despite ours or our family's existing life circumstances, job, health or financial crises, we can turn to an almighty God for help.

Do we love Jesus? Well, his ministry was always under threat. Our New United Gospel Food Mission celebrated in worship yesterday our first year of service to the community. We had a mini choir, a translator, prayer, Scripture, and lots of singing. I noticed that even in this difficult environment, the folks who were present were grateful and most sang praises to God – How Great Thou Art! We had only 45 families whereas we normally have 70 families on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Saturdays, so many have gone underground to stay safe. We pray for their food and financial provisions. One might say we provided temporary respite from the realities of our present harsh deserts for these neighbors. God's blessing was the focus, not us. As David wrote:

<sup>3</sup> Because your love is better than life,  
my lips will glorify you.

<sup>4</sup> I will praise you as long as I live,  
and in your name I will lift up my hands.

<sup>5</sup> I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods;  
with singing lips my mouth will praise you.

<sup>6</sup> On my bed I remember you;  
 I think of you through the watches of the night.  
<sup>7</sup> Because you are my help,  
 I sing in the shadow of your wings.  
<sup>8</sup> I cling to you;  
 your right hand upholds me (Psalm 63:3-8 <sup>NIV</sup>).

How does that resonate with your desert or wilderness? Can you hear the words of hospitality even in a hostile desert environment? I am asking questions for you to think about. The hospitality I saw in the Judean desert came from God's natural creations like caves, water, greenery, and birds singing, but also from the people I was with, the drivers, guides and their wives who provided cookies and coffee for us. Remember the song we sang a couple weeks ago, "*On Eagles Wings?*" I hope you kept the insert for inspiration. We must find or be the hospitality for others in today's inhospitable world.

Our second passage is from the apostle Paul writing to the Corinthians, a group of believers highly influenced by their pagan culture. He warns them against idolatry. This city was a desert of sorts, a desert of belief in Christ Jesus. He advises that they exchange the culture for spiritual food and water that only Christ can give. He puts the Hebrew and Greek scriptures together to say that Christ was with the Israelites in the wilderness with Moses—Christ was their rock that produced living water. It makes sense to use language they might understand since Paul studied the Torah; perhaps he saw the prophecy of the Messiah in the stories of their Egyptian escape.

Paul's main point is to warn the Corinthians about temptation and how sin will thrust them into a desert of no return. If they will believe with their hearts, minds, and bodies that Jesus came to save them, there

will be water and manna in any desert they face. Paul declares that Christ is the ultimate hospitality in the desert of temptation. We should realize the same thing! Hospitality is found in desert situations by discovery and surrender to a Savior who loves us deeply and eternally. So, church, we too must find the hospitality of love, hope, charity, mercy, faith and grace in whatever desert we are traveling through; our passage ends: “God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it (1 Corinthians 10:1-13 <sup>NIV</sup>).” Emmanuel – Christ with us! You are not alone. Amen! || **Let us pray.** Dear Lord, we thank you for your teaching, your example, and your presence. Open our minds and hearts to accept the divine hospitality that is present in you, in us, and in your people. Guide us personally and as a church to answer the call to hospitality in various ways this year. May you nurture and encourage us, fueling our mission and purpose to serve you and to share our faith and gratitude with others. Lead us in our deserts wherever they may take us. It is in Jesus’ name, we pray, Amen.