



# FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

## “SURVIVING THE WILDERNESS”

Scripture Lessons: Exodus 16:1-5; Ephesians 6:13-20

*This sermon was preached by Rev. Tracey Daniel on Sunday, September 5, 2021  
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

Ephesians 6:13-20

Therefore, take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

Let us pray: May the words of my heart and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God. Our Rock and Redeemer. Amen

Surviving the Wilderness (Exodus 16:1-5; Ephesians 6: 13-20)

- I. When you hear the word wilderness? What comes to your mind?  
When I think of the wilderness-images from the popular movie series which began in 1981- *Indiana Jones* comes to mind.
- II. Describe the Wilderness:  
I see vines everywhere. Danger lurking around every corner. Spiders, snakes and other creepy, crawly beasts slithering around. Images of a deep, dark, damp jungle with Mosquitoes and other insects buzzing and biting. I imagine a landscape peppered with snares and traps. The wilderness is unfamiliar territory and it can cause us to fear.
- III. In today's Old Testament reading, the Israelites are wandering around in their wilderness. Although the particulars of the landscape of their wilderness were quite different from mine, what the two have in common is that like any wilderness, it was unfamiliar territory to them and at times they were afraid. The land, where the Israelites wandered, was more desert than jungle. It was dry. There were hills and mountains and maybe old volcanoes. The land itself was barren and rocky. The

Israelites were afraid that they would starve to death. There was a limited water supply. There was not enough food to forage to sustain them. The people were beginning to think they had made a mistake and should go back to Egypt. They began to forget why they left Egypt. They only remembered the food and water and other good things they experienced there.

- IV. Many important stories of the Bible take place in the wilderness. In these wilderness stories a person or group of people must trust God to survive. In the wilderness transformation can happen. Faith can become stronger. People who survive the wilderness have a story to tell about God's faithfulness.
- V. In the passage from Exodus that we read today, God provided the Israelites what they needed to Survive. The people needed food. God gives them bread that falls from heaven that they call Manna. We aren't 100% sure what manna was but it is thought to be honeylike droppings from a local tree produced by insects on the tree. The dry air of the desert would cause moisture to evaporate from this honeylike substance and leave a solid substance that the people could eat. The manna was sent by God on an as needed basis. Once a day the manna would fall and the people were told to collect enough for that one day. There was one day a week when an exception was made. The day before the Sabbath, the people were to collect enough for two days, so they could rest on the Sabbath.
- VI. At some time or another, each one of us will find ourselves traveling in the wilderness. A place that is unfamiliar and can cause us to feel fearful. When this season is upon us, today's scripture lessons can encourage us and give us guidance.
  - 1-Remember God will provide for us one day at a time.
  - 2-Even in our season in the Wilderness, we need to observe Sabbath. Maybe especially when you are in the wilderness you must make time for Sabbath.

Taking a day of rest in 2021, looks a lot different than it did not so many years ago. We have sort of let it go. I want to encourage you to reconsider how you practice Sabbath.

One of my favorite writers about Sabbath is Wayne Mueller. In his book called *Sabbath*, he writes about how all of life has a rhythm. This is God's design.

- There is a rhythm of daytime activity followed by a need for nighttime sleep.
- There is a rhythm in the way our lungs work. We inhale air and then we exhale.
- There are seasons for planting, seasons for growing and seasons for harvesting.
- There is a rhythm in the sea. The tides come in and go out.
- This is the way God made things. We need to be sure to make sure we are practicing Sabbath if we want to be our best selves. This down time helps us remember who we are and how God wants us to live each and every day.

The New Testament:

The passage from the Ephesians offers some additional words of wisdom of how to survive the wilderness. I particularly like the way Eugene Peterson interprets this passage in the Message. Hear the Exodus passage again.

“Be prepared. You’re up against far more than you can handle on your own. Take all the help you can get, every weapon God has issued, so that when it is all over but the shouting you’ll still be on your feet. Truth, righteousness, peace, faith and salvation are more than words. Learn how to apply them. You’ll need them throughout your life. God’s Word is an indispensable weapon. In the same way, prayer is essential in this ongoing warfare. Pray hard and long. Pray for your brothers and sisters. Keep your eyes open. Keep each other’s spirits up so that no one falls behind or drops out.”

What can we glean from this New Testament instruction about surviving the wilderness? Two specific action items stand out. Read the Bible and Pray without ceasing.

Discerning God’s word for our lives requires us as individuals to read and study the Bible. What does it say? What does it mean? We as Presbyterians, believe that God gave us minds and we should use them. We listen for how the Spirit is speaking to us. There are so many tools that can help us do this. There are Sunday School Classes we can join. Rally day is next week. There are Bible Studies. There are Apps you can download on your phone. You can just begin a discipline of daily reading of the Bible.

The Ephesians passage also, tells us to pray without ceasing. Praying is a spiritual discipline. Most of us, since we were very small Children have been taught to pray. What blessing did you say around your dinner table? Good is Great, God is good, or the Johnny Appleseed blessings? I bet most of you still remember it. What about prayers at bedtime? Did you have certain people you prayed for before you went to bed each night? When we pray, we are making time and space, to be with God. Praying is an act of faith. It reminds us in a very real way, that we trust God.

Sometimes adults will tell me that they do not know how to pray. This is what I tell those people. Praying is talking to God. There are so many tools to help us pray. There are many books on prayer. Read some and see what fits for you. I enjoyed, Anne Lamott’s book, *Help, Thanks, Wow!* Another tool to help us pray is the acronym ACTS. This helps us get beyond just offering God our list of things for God to do for us!

A- is for Adoration. What is it that you adore about God? God is our creator is what first comes to my mind.

C- is for confession. What is interrupting your discipleship? What is keeping you trapped in the wilderness? What do you do that you wish that you didn’t do? What don’t you do you mean to do? Confess these things and God will forgive you. Clean Slate- Fresh Start.

T- is for Thanksgiving. What are you thankful for? Who brings joy to your life? What activities give you pleasure? Give Thanks!

S- is for supplication. Who do you carry on your heart who needs help? Here is where we give to God all the burdens that we are carrying. God's got this! If there is something you feel called to do, to help the person and the person also thinks your help is needed, then do it! Sometimes, the best we have to offer is our faith that God will provide.

Studying the Bible and praying helps us navigate the wilderness.

In the beginning of this message, I shared my personal imagine of the wilderness. It came straight out of the *Indiana Jones* movies that I watched as a young person. Part of that image for me is the hero of the story, Indiana Jones, fighting his way triumphantly through every danger that crossed his path.

As I end this message, I hope to leave you with another image. It is the image you see in the mirror each day, traveling along life's journey and from time to time encountering a season of wilderness, that you must pass through. When this happens, you carry God's word in your heart, you pray, you remember to take time to rest and be renewed so you can remember God's promise to provide for all your needs, at just the right time. When you pass through the wilderness, you will have a faith story to pass along to others. Amen.

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