

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Sometimes time goes by sooooo sloooooow.

In Exodus, we find the Israelites are on a long journey in the wilderness that today, would only take a few days, but for the Israelites, it took 40 years.

The text says they “journeyed by stages.” It wasn’t one easy straight line from point A to point B. It was a journey marked by distinct segments with new struggles to survive in each one. Before this passage, they were starving and cried out for food. Before THAT, they were being chased by their oppressors out of Egypt. And then, if you look ahead, AFTER this passage they are literally attacked.

Today, we meet the Israelites at their latest crisis, in their *latest* stage. The people and Moses all seem to be agitated. Everyone is quarreling with one another. They haven’t seen water in DAYS and they are parched. They cry out for water and for life! Because DEATH.... is right around the corner.

I don’t know how many times I’ve heard someone say recently that we too seem to be in never ending year. And it’s been in stages- hasn’t it?

We saw the world screech to a halt in the first few weeks of the pandemic in March. Then we watched in horror as we saw the death tolls rise. Later, in June, with George Floyd’s murder, many of us watched and participated in social upheaval as we demanded that racist systems come to an end. Not long after

that, wildfires ravaged communities on the west coast. And this past week, the lack of justice for Breonna Taylor who DID not DESERVE TO DIE, **heavies** our hearts and ENRAGES us at how sick our justice system is.

Each stage of 2020 brings a new crisis, new challenges to the fabric of our society, new tests to our mental and physical health.

The pandemic, our racist economic and criminal justice systems, and our environmental challenges today are not just 2020 problems. They have roots that go back decades- centuries even!

For example, Some of the stages that got us to the environmental crisis that we have today in 2020 are clear:

- 1) The first industrial revolution and the first coal-powered engine in 1712
- 2) The second industrial revolution and the first automobile in 1893
- 3) Increasing carbon dioxide emissions, peaking in recent years at around 32 billion tons released into our air each year

And, most recently –we have seen the unprecedented spread of wildfires on the west coast. FIVE of the SIX largest fires in California HISTORY were in the past SIX WEEKS.¹ And Scientists say that this increase is likely caused by extra dry landscapes created by “*human-induced warming.*”²

¹ Michael McGough, “5 of the 6 largest California wildfires in history started in the past 6 weeks,” *The Sacramento Bee*, September 22, 2020. <https://www.sacbee.com/news/california/fires/article245917915.html>

² A. Park Williams, et. al. “Observed Impacts of Anthropogenic Climate Change on Wildfire in California.” *Earth’s Future* Vol. 7, Issue 8. August 2019. <https://agupubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1029/2019EF001210>

For many generations now, we have been what poet Terry Tempest Williams calls “dead to the world that is alive.”³ We have been “dead” to the land that thirsts, the animals that thirst, the people who thirst.

When I am here in nature, I especially remember just how much life there is beyond me and how I have not always been in tune with my community of creation.

But now, thanks to 2020, WE TOO are CRYING OUT FOR RELIEF in ways that we weren’t at the beginning of this year. Relief from the coronavirus, from the racist structures killing our human siblings, from wildfires and the climate change behind the fires, and from the **helplessness** that we feel in the face of it all.

When the Israelites cried out for relief, God responded them in each new stage of their difficult journey and in each new crisis. God responded to the cries for justice of the Israelites before they even left Egypt when they were still enslaved. God responded in the very moment they were fleeing, and later when they were hungry and thirsty. God responded to each new cry for justice and LIFE in the wilderness.

In this latest stage, God not only hears the cries of the people, God tells Moses that God “will be standing *in front of*” him, at the rock where God will cause water to spring forth. God goes BEFORE Moses and the Israelites.

At each new stage of their never-ending wilderness journey, (sound like 2020 anyone?) God GOES BEFORE THEM providing waters that literally KEEP THEM

³ Terry Tempest Williams, “Obituary for the Land” in “The Pall of our Unrest” *Mountain Journal*. September 19, 2020. <https://mountainjournal.org/terry-tempest-williams-says-it-time-to-rally-for-nature-and-country>

ALIVE. And provides life-giving strength to pick up one foot after the other and eventually arrive to the other side of hardship.

God also hears our cries for relief on every stage of our lives, of 2020-and goes before *us* like God went before Moses and the Israelites.

This week on Twitter, Political Science Professor and Crisis Management Expert Dr. Aisha Ahmad says that the six month mark of **any** crisis is especially hard. Now as we face six month mark of living in a global pandemic, she encouraged her Twitter Followers to take stock of our resourcefulness and ability to adapt, so far. She says, “We’ve already re-learned how to do groceries, host meetings, and even teach classes.” She says, “We have found new ways to live, love, and be happy under these rough conditions...This is hard proof that we **have** what it takes to keep going.”⁴

Her words were like water for my soul this week encouraged me this week and reminded me of how God goes before **us** in providing **us** with what **we** need. While the crises of 2020 have been centuries in the making, so have the tools that we can use to solve these crises.

Yes, the current environmental crises of 2020, are a result of centuries of neglect, being “dead to what’s alive.” But during that time we’ve also seen advances in scientific knowledge and methods, new clean energy sources, new water-saving technology, and greater awareness about the human, animal and plant life that is at stake.

⁴ https://twitter.com/ProfAishaAhmad?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor

Now, we have the chance to use the gifts, passions, as well as the new knowledge, experiences and even the HEARTBREAK that we now have, to mobilize- to **WAKE UP** “to the world that is alive.” To **pay attention** and to use the gifts that God has already given to us to provide life-giving relief to our community of creation.

It won't be easy, we won't stop agitating and crying for justice. There is still a long way to go when it comes to this year, this pandemic, and all the challenges of the past centuries coming to a head at THIS moment in time.

But we can confidently continue on into 2020, knowing that God has gone before us and that God continues to provide on each new stage of the journey.

Amen.