

## “Whining...A Pre-Resiliency Response”

John 3: 14-21; Ephesians 2: 4, 5b-10; Psalm 25: 1, 4-5, 9-10

March 11, 2018 Fourth Sunday of Lent

For group reflection:

Numbers – OK, we know God does not punish people...this is not a reward and punishment God (Jesus says so!) ...even though we often still act this way. So when this story is being told, it is more that the people connected their turning away from God and complaining without owning the place in the journey and the bigger picture, they connect their “sinfulness” to the snakes coming. But really listen to the whole and the end of the story.

BTW, this is a health story! A life story. Interestingly, the word resiliency has a health history too. Here’s a bit of linguistic history: the word resilience came to be used in the 1800’s to also include the power of recovery...it has to do with our ability to heal...physically, yes.

Spiritually and emotionally, yes.

Linguistically long ago it was connected to the word Creed...whose root meaning is to give yourself credit. Whoa! So, when the church puts forth creeds, it is to invite you to think...we give you credit to be able to do this...not swallow whole the creed itself.

John – Jesus continuing to speak after the story of Nicodemus and being born

over and over again. We hold this story alongside all of the other stories and deeply know that Jesus is not saying to worship him. He is wisdom incarnate and shows us the ways to live in relationship with God and so finding deeper meaning and peace. The point is in verse 17...not 16.

And so as it is read, as with the Ephesians story, I will take the liberty not to use the “in him” language so you may hear it newly.

You think it for yourself.

When you hear the word, resilience, what comes to mind?

And you already are...you’re here, right?

The faithing journey is about being self-aware and using our strengths/our courage in daily life...the resiliency responses we already have as we seek a peace filled life

...even on the way to our own  
Jeruselems.

We go with what works and let go of what doesn’t.

And, we're willing to keep learning a few new things along the way....knowing we are to survive, yes...

But we are to do so...bringing everyone else with us along the way...to seek right relationship, inclusive of all.

The entire Jesus story is about taking responsibility to look deeply within, into our hearts, our minds and our motivations.

The stories challenge us to ask: ***How resilient am I?***

Which begs the question...am I really willing to go out into the unknown, the darkness?

Is this really to me better than a light and safer than a known way?

Do I live my life in the light of wisdom, put my hand into the hand of God and trust I will make it through and then some?

***And as we hear today's wisdom teachings...***

What are you afraid of? Right now. What makes you so anxious that it that pushes you to complain?

The story in Numbers uses the word: complain....theologians understand their complaining to be part of an undercurrent of murmuring in the desert....

first about no food-then given manna,  
then no water-springs from a rock,  
and now the food and water not good enough

*...murmur....more like restlessness....perhaps having lost sight of their entrusted, common vision.*

It says they were impatient...  
the Hebrew word actually means "**short on soul**".

So, to be patient is to be **long on soul**. With a long soul, you can take the longer view and trust in a new future  
...things then are reflected back to you differently.

Some light shines.  
There's room for some grace in your head and heart!

So, when you are short sighted, complaining, only seeing what is immediately at hand, you often complain, you lose patience.

~Would say you are able to see the bigger picture in life right now... able to assess things with a long soul?

~When was the last time you were short on soul, impatient and probably complaining/demanding? What did that look like? How did things play out in the long run?

Were you invested in your self-interest more than the larger interest at stake?

**Sometimes we're more comfortable in the darkness of a known problem and pattern, than in the light... a perspective of possibility.**

**How resilient are you?**

To live, to find patience....you have to face what it is that is biting you, killing you....face to face...in the mirror!

Therein is the power to be healed.

(And know, once healed you, that reflection of yourself, that snake bite will come up again for life lives a spiral.

For those in the light, the next time they are face to face with their snake, they do so from a different perspective and awareness...and never alone...and they live!)

Did you catch it in the story? God didn't take the serpents away. Life is full of snakes. It is by staring at them, staring them down that we have life.

In a sense, God invites us to look at things differently and so develop new insights. This is healing.

We must navigate through our own deserts of snakes, our own consequences! But we can do it!

We too, like the Hebrews...  
even though God has brought us out from our Egypt  
and through the wilderness and provided for our needs,

even though the journey isn't over and neither is God,

**we too** often look at life without  
enough gratitude and faith...  
short on soul....without perspective,  
we become impatient and murmur....in the dark.

Gosh darn it! How often we want our *needs* met  
in this moment!

The Hebrews acted as if the state of their lives was someone else's fault...anyone else's  
fault...God's fault...  
*saying,*

“Do something! Somebody do something about this life  
of mine. I want my basic needs met, now, by someone else.”

And what do they get for all their complaining? Snakes.

If we go beyond the surface of the story to its symbolism, given our fear of snakes and  
how anxious even seeing one snake can make us,

we could say the snakes represent the fears and anxieties  
of the people. Our fears and anxieties!

Fear and anxiety a natural consequence of their inability to stay attached to their long  
terms goal and the good  
in their own story...God's grace alive amongst them!

Like getting so frustrated saving money for a newer car whose purchase seems so far  
off, you spend all your money on something else that doesn't satisfy...and then  
complain about it and blame the “times” for your not having that car.

Like being angry with a friend and dumping the friendship rather than confronting the  
issues.

Like leaving a job, relationship, church when things are tough rather than  
remembering your long term vision...  
use a long soul approach.

They complain and blame and fold in on themselves.

They are bitten by their own anxieties and fears.

They are making themselves sick.

**Are you?**

**What's the snake that's biting you?**

*(Might you like to come up and light a prayer candle acknowledging you're your anxiety/your pain and open yourself to a new possibility to heal?)*

Snakes. Several ancient gods were associated with snakes....and healing!

The A.M.A. EVEN HAS TWO SNAKES ON A STICK AS THEIR SYMBOL OF HEALING...THIS IS RELATED TO THE MEANING OF THE WORD SERAPH, TRANSLATED AS SERPENT.

The Hebrew word seraph means "to burn"...it was a burning snake.

The dual characteristics of fire are its capacity to purify or destroy....you could say to heal or destroy.

**So, the bite can either heal them or destroy them ....it's up to them....  
what they do...you do...  
and where they, you, look for help.**

Will they/you blame and complain or will we own up to our fears and anxieties to discover what is just beneath them?

Will you live courageously and look first at yourself and then to your do-over God for a new beginning in grace...

or will you stay stuck in your complaining expecting someone else to intervene and save you from yourself?

**How resilient are you?**

Remember: You cure the snake bite with its own venom, a vaccination uses the very illness to prevent itself.

Too much of a good thing is bad.  
Too little, and that's not good either.  
A snake on a stick. Look at it!

And to our story in John....Jesus begins saying **He must also be lifted up...on a stick...for our healing...**

Christ on a stick...a cross...same metaphors apply!  
An invitation to look at what we're doing and respond in new ways!

In this often cited verse: John 3:17, Jesus' focus is not on himself but on us, an invitation to let go of any image of a condemning God to understand God wants us to live in new ways, in relationship with God/Divine Energy.

It's not a call to a set of ideas of right belief/thinking  
but a call to live on the way, loving, faithing.

This is not an exclusive gateway for Christians to get into heaven. There were no Christians then...Hebrews, Gentiles, Romans, heard these words.

Never ever does Jesus talk in this way. He is not being asked to be worshiped and His words open to all who believe.

**He is a bridge... "a" bridge.**

God is here and heaven is right here....live like it! Cross over!

Look to the bigger meaning of the cross...Christ on a stick.

Look yourself in the mirror, the snake in the eye,  
quiet those voices, trust yourself and God and  
use the resiliency skills you already have!

"I did not come to condemn the world but to save it!"

~Condemn....the Greek actually means divide apart...from each other...fraction  
yourself....pull you apart...life will feel like snakes biting you! God doesn't want that for  
us!

~Save....here the Greek means heal as in salve, remember Marcus Borg's teaching on  
salvation being a salve for the healing you need most now.

A salve to save us....from ourselves,  
healing from within by looking life straight on...  
and not alone, with each other.

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If you don't face the facts...in the life you have created for yourself as you respond to the desert you live in...

the facts will jump up and bite you right where  
it will hurt you most!

Snakes are not our enemies. They are no longer a symbol of evil or temptation.  
(In Matthew, Jesus says to us: be wise as serpents.)

As we understand these stories, snakes become our new best friends.

The truth about ourselves is the very thing that can save us!

God doesn't condemn us, divide us, break us apart.  
God says

**“Turn your life around, look at what you're doing, does life have to bite you  
before I get your attention?”**

**I'm here to help...I've come so you may have life...  
a life worth living!”**

We feel about our lives the way we do for very good reasons.

What matters is what we do  
with the feelings we have,  
how we face the facts and the faith,  
and how we look to God.

**How resilient are you?**

We can stop being so short on soul perspective  
and start living...long!  
It's up to us!  
That's how much power God gives each of us!

We have everything we need right here to be healed...  
in our medicine kit of  
self-awareness...and trust in the long view of things.

Snakes of grief, loss, fear, anger, anxiety, low self-esteem....  
May bite us but we can focus differently.

We have the power to see clearly, pray, forgive ourselves and others, and live right through....our snakes!

“I remember that all through history  
the ways of truth and love have always won.  
There have been tyrants, and murderers,  
(snakes, unbelievers, impatience, darkness,  
doubting/complaining inner voices)  
and for a time they can seem invincible,  
but in the end they always fall.  
Think of it - always.”

Mahatma Gandhi

We are resilient!

I like Lent. It reminds me...  
I am capable....

I can welcome what's next.  
The good and bad, beautiful and ugly...yes, I can.

~Just like Jesus, I am made able to stand up against what is not right/not just in life.

~And just like Jesus, I can choose an alternative way to think and feel and act....not alone but in relationship with God and other disciples....

This is the part where I find out who I am!  
How resilient I am!  
And, I affirm: I can welcome what's next!