

Psalm 107:1-9,43
June 18, '17

“OUT OF THE DESERT”

**SEVERAL WEEKS AGO, I GAVE THOUGHT TO A
SUMMER SERMON SERIES & BEGAN TO CONSIDER
VARIOUS POSSIBILITIES.**

**ONCE I SETTLED ON A DIRECTION, I BEGAN TO
WORK IN EARNEST TO PUT THE PIECES TOGETHER
FOR A 12-WEEK SERIES OF SERMONS THAT FOCUSED
ON ONE PARTICULAR, OVER-RIDING THEME.**

**I SPENT SEVERAL DAYS WORKING ON IT & FELT
PRETTY PLEASED WITH THE WAY IT ALL SEEMED
TO COME TOGETHER.**

**I WENT HOME & SHARED THE IDEA FOR THE
SERIES & MY EXCITEMENT WITH EMMA SUE.**

**SHE DIDN'T IMMEDIATELY RESPOND WITH THE
SAME EXCITEMENT THAT I WAS EXPERIENCING & I**

COULD TELL SHE WAS TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO GENTLY TELL ME WHAT SHE THOUGHT ABOUT MY IDEA.

“AT ANOTHER TIME OF YEAR,” SHE SAID, “THAT MIGHT BE A GREAT IDEA. BUT FOR THE SUMMER, THAT SOUNDS REALLY BORING.”

OVER THE YEARS, I HAVE LEARNED TO TRUST EMMA SUE’S JUDGMENT.

THEREFORE, MY SERMON SERIES THAT FOCUSED ON *THE THEOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE HISTORIC CREEDS OF THE CHURCH FROM THE APOSTOLIC AGE THROUGH THE REFORMATION & INTO THE POSTMODERN ERA*” THAT I THOUGHT I HAD CLEVERLY NAMED “*A SUMMER CREEDING PROGRAM*” WAS PUT ASIDE.

YES, YOU CAN ALL THANK HER LATER.

THAT PARTICULAR FOCUS WAS PUT ASIDE, BUT NOT THE IDEA OF A SUMMER SERMON SERIES.

WITH OUR LONG-STANDING INTEREST & COMMITMENT TO “CHRISTIANITY & THE ARTS,” I DECIDED IT MIGHT BE FUN TO DO SOMETHING WITH THAT THEME FOR THE SUMMER.

WE HAVE MAINTAINED THAT SOMETHING DOESN'T HAVE TO BE OVERTLY CHRISTIAN TO CARRY A CHRISTIAN MESSAGE.

WITH THAT THOUGHT IN MIND, WE'RE GOING TO LOOK AT 4 BOOKS, 4 MOVIES & 4 SONGS THAT I HAVE FOUND PARTICULARLY MEANINGFUL IN CONVEYING A MESSAGE OF FAITH WITHOUT NECESSARILY BEING OVERTLY CHRISTIAN.

**WE BEGIN TODAY WITH A BOOK THAT
CHRONICLES ONE OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST
ADVENTURE STORIES.**

**45 YEARS AGO, THIS COMING OCTOBER, AN
EVENT TOOK PLACE THAT CHANGED FOREVER THE
LIVES OF 16 YOUNG MEN.**

**29 OTHERS PERISHED IN THAT EVENT & IT IS
REMEMBERED PRIMARILY BECAUSE THOSE 29 WHO
DIED ENABLED THE OTHER 16 TO LIVE.**

**THAT EVENT WAS THE CRASH IN THE ANDES
MOUNTAINS OF A PLANE CARRYING MEMBERS OF A
RUGBY TEAM FROM URUGUAY.**

**THEIR STORY WAS TOLD MAGNIFICENTLY BY A
YOUNG ENGLISH AUTHOR NAMED PIERS PAUL READ
IN HIS BOOK ALIVE.**

I REMEMBER READING IT WHEN IT WAS FIRST PUBLISHED & IT IS, TO THIS DAY, ONE OF THE MOST MOVING BOOKS I’VE EVER READ.

IT’S A STORY OF FAITH, COURAGE, STRENGTH, PERSEVERANCE, UNDYING HOPE & ULTIMATELY, DELIVERANCE FROM A CRUEL FATE.

I THINK OF THOSE SURVIVORS WHEN I READ THIS PSALM.

THIS IS A PSALM OF DELIVERANCE.

IT BEGINS WITH WORDS THAT ARE FOUND IN MANY OF THE PSALMS – *“O GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD, FOR HE IS GOOD; HIS STEADFAST LOVE ENDURES FOREVER.”*

IN FACT, IN THE PSALM WE USED THIS MORNING AS OUR CALL TO WORSHIP, PSALM 136, EACH OF THE

26 VERSES CONCLUDES WITH THE WORDS, “*HIS STEADFAST LOVE ENDURES FOREVER.*”

IT IS A RECURRING THEME IN THE PSALMS.

IN THIS PSALM, WE ARE PRESENTED WITH FOUR DIFFERENT SCENARIOS – FOUR SITUATIONS OF HUMAN NEED & THE PROMISE OF GOD’S DELIVERANCE IN EACH OF THOSE SITUATIONS.

THE VERSES OF OUR PASSAGE TODAY ADDRESS THE FIRST ONE – THOSE IN DIRE LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES WHO FACE SEEMINGLY INSURMOUNTABLE DIFFICULTIES – ONE RIGHT AFTER ANOTHER.

FOLLOWING THAT CRASH IN THE ANDES MOUNTAINS, THERE WERE INITIALLY 28 SURVIVORS.

THEY HAD TO ENDURE UNIMAGINABLE HARSHIPS.

**A SERIES OF AVALANCHES FOLLOWED THAT
TOOK THE LIVES OF MANY OF THOSE SURVIVORS &
THOSE WHO REMAINED HAD ALL SUSTAINED SOME
DEBILITATING INJURY OR ANOTHER.**

**THEY WERE SORELY LACKING IN FOOD AND,
PERHAPS WORST OF ALL, THE TEMPERATURE WAS
10-15 DEGREES BELOW ZERO.**

**NONE OF US HERE HAS EVER ENDURED
SOMETHING LIKE THAT & YET SOME OF YOU HAVE
COME CLOSE.**

**AND EVERY ONE OF US HERE HAS ENDURED
SEEMINGLY INSURMOUNTABLE TRIALS.**

**AS I LOOK AROUND THE SANCTUARY THIS
MORNING, I KNOW THE PERSONAL & INDIVIDUAL
STRUGGLES THAT MANY OF YOU HAVE FACED.**

I KNOW THAT YOU HAVE GONE THROUGH VERY PAINFUL & INCREDIBLY CHALLENGING TIMES OF LIFE.

IN THIS PSALM, THERE ARE THOSE WHO CRY OUT TO GOD FOR HELP.

CRYING OUT TO GOD – LIVING IN DEPENDENCE ON GOD - IS NOT SIMPLY AN EMERGENCY MEASURE, BUT A WAY OF LIFE.

IN THE PARTICULAR SCENARIO OF THIS PSALM, THOSE WHO HAVE CRIED OUT FOR HELP IN THE MIDST OF THEIR DIFFICULTIES, WANDER AIMLESSLY – SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS IN A DESPERATE QUEST TO FIND A WAY OUT.

THOSE SURVIVORS IN THE ANDES MOUNTAINS SPENT 10 WEEKS IN THE BITTER COLD, BUT THEY

DIDN'T JUST SIT AROUND & WAIT FOR HELP TO ARRIVE.

A HALF-DOZEN TIMES THEY SENT AN EXPEDITION TEAM TO FIND A WAY OUT OF THE MOUNTAINS – MOUNTAINS THAT WERE, IN REALITY, A DESERT BECAUSE THERE WAS NO LIFE OF ANY KIND TO BE SEEN ANYWHERE.

THOSE EXPEDITIONS PROVED FRUITLESS.

THEY DIDN'T KNOW WHERE THEY WERE, SO THEY DIDN'T KNOW WHICH WAY TO GO.

THEY HAD TO CLIMB THE MOUNTAINS TO SEE THE OTHER SIDE.

THEY WERE ATTEMPTING TO DO WHAT WOULD HAVE BEEN EXTRAORDINARILY DIFFICULT EVEN IF THEY HAD BEEN EQUIPPED WITH THE PROPER

**CLOTHING & PROPER TOOLS & IN PHYSICAL
CONDITION TO ACCOMPLISH SUCH A VENTURE.**

**THEY WANDERED ABOUT, NEVER FINDING THE
RIGHT PATH – EACH TIME BARELY MAKING IT BACK
TO THE CRASH SITE WHERE THEY HAD BEGUN.**

**HOW OFTEN DO WE FIND OURSELVES ON A
DESERT MOUNTAIN, NOT KNOWING WHERE WE ARE
IN LIFE, FACING EVEN HIGHER MOUNTAINS BEFORE
US, NOT KNOWING WHAT DIRECTION TO GO,
DESPERATELY SEARCHING FOR A WAY OUT?**

**THE WANDERERS IN THIS PSALM EXPERIENCED
SUCH A PREDICAMENT & EVEN IN THE MIDST OF
THEIR DIRE CIRCUMSTANCES, THEY KNEW ENOUGH
OF GOD’S LOVE TO PROCLAIM – *“O GIVE THANKS TO
THE LORD, FOR HE IS GOOD; HIS STEADFAST LOVE
ENDURES FOREVER.”***

HALFWAY THROUGH THE ORDEAL IN THE ANDES MOUNTAINS, ONE OF THE YOUNG MEN WROTE A LETTER TO HIS PARENTS.

HE SAID, *“IN SITUATIONS SUCH AS THIS, EVEN REASON CANNOT UNDERSTAND THE INFINITE AND ABSOLUTE POWER OF GOD OVER ME. I HAVE NEVER SUFFERED AS I DO NOW – PHYSICALLY & MORALLY – THOUGH I HAVE NEVER BELIEVED IN HIM SO MUCH. PHYSICALLY THIS IS TORTURE – DAY BY DAY, NIGHT BY NIGHT – WITH A BROKEN LEG & SWOLLEN ANKLE, AND THE ANKLE OF THE OTHER LEG EQUALLY SWOLLEN. STRENGTH...LIFE IS HARD BUT IT IS WORTH LIVING. EVEN IN SUFFERING, COURAGE.”*

IN THIS PSALM, WE ARE PRESENTED WITH THOSE WHO ARE LOOKING FOR THE STRENGTH & COURAGE TO GO ON.

**THEY'RE LOOKING FOR THEIR WANDERINGS TO
END.**

**THEY DON'T WANT TO CONTINUE GOING IN
CIRCLES IN PURSUIT OF ANSWERS.**

**THEY DON'T WANT TO CONTINUE TO TAKE A
CIRCUITOUS ROUTE TO SAFETY.**

IN THEIR CRIES, GOD DELIVERS THEM.

***“THEN THEY CRIED TO THE LORD IN THEIR
TROUBLE, AND GOD DELIVERED THEM FROM THEIR
DISTRESS; HE LED THEM BY A STRAIGHT WAY UNTIL
THEY REACHED AN INHABITED CITY.”***

**HAS THAT, PERHAPS, BEEN YOUR OWN
PERSONAL EXPERIENCE?**

**HAVE YOU FOUND THAT GOD HAS BEEN THERE
FOR YOU, DELIVERING YOU FROM YOUR
DISTRESS...LEADING YOU BY A STRAIGHT**

WAY...BRINGING YOU TO A PLACE OF JOY & HOPE & SECURITY?

IN THE ANDES MOUNTAINS, IN EARLY DECEMBER, 1972, EIGHT WEEKS AFTER THE ORDEAL OF THE SURVIVORS HAD BEGUN, AN EXPEDITION TEAM SET OUT ONCE AGAIN.

TWO WEEKS LATER, AFTER STRUGGLING & CLIMBING, PLEADING & PRAYING TO GOD, NANDO PARRADO & ROBERTO CANESSA THOUGHT THAT FINALLY THEIR PRAYERS MAY HAVE BEEN ANSWERED.

IT'S RATHER LENGTHY, BUT LISTEN TO PIERS PAUL READ'S VERY MOVING ACCOUNT OF THEIR EXPERIENCE:

“THEY WALKED ON, AND SLOWLY THE SOUND OF THEIR CUSHIONED FEET ON THE SNOW, WHICH HAD

*BEEN ALL THAT BROKE THE SILENCE, WAS
SUPERSEDED BY A ROARING NOISE WHICH GREW
LOUDER AND LOUDER AS THEY APPROACHED THE
END OF THE VALLEY.*

*A PANIC ENTERED THE HEARTS OF THEM BOTH.
WHAT IF AN IMPASSABLE TORRENT BLOCKED
THEIR WAY?*

*PARRADO'S IMPATIENCE TO SEE WHAT LAY
AHEAD NOW TOOK COMPLETE POSSESSION OF HIM.*

*HIS PACE, ALREADY FAST, QUICKENED, AND HIS
STRIDES GREW WIDER OVER THE SNOW.*

*'YOU'LL KILL YOURSELF!' CANESSA SHOUTED
AFTER HIM AS PARRADO DREW AHEAD, YET HE TOO
WAS POSSESSED NOT SO MUCH BY CURIOSITY AS BY
DREAD OF WHAT THEY WERE TO SEE.*

'OH, GOD,' CANESSA PRAYED ONCE AGAIN, 'BY ALL MEANS TEST US TO THE LIMIT OF OUR ENDURANCE, BUT PLEASE MAKE IT HUMANLY POSSIBLE TO GO ON. PLEASE LET THERE BE SOME SORT OF PATH BY THE RIVER.'

PARRADO WALKED FASTER AND FASTER STILL. HE PRAYED, TOO, BUT ABOVE ALL HE WAS OBSESSED WITH CURIOSITY.

HE DREW TWO HUNDRED YARDS AHEAD OF CANESSA & THEN SUDDENLY FOUND HIMSELF AT THE END OF THE VALLEY.

THE VIEW WHICH MET HIS EYES WAS OF PARADISE.

THE SNOW STOPPED. FROM UNDER ITS WHITE SHELL THERE Poured FORTH A TORRENT OF GRAY WATER WHICH FLOWED

***WITH TREMENDOUS FORCE INTO A GORGE AND
TUMBLED OVER BOULDERS AND STONES TO THE
WEST.***

***AND MORE BEAUTIFUL STILL, EVERYWHERE HE
LOOKED THERE WERE PATCHES OF GREEN – MOSS,
GRASS, RUSHES, JUNIPER BUSHES AND YELLOW &
PURPLE FLOWERS.***

***AS PARRADO STOOD THERE, HIS FACE WET WITH
TEARS OF JOY, CANESSA CAME UP BEHIND HIM, AND
HE TOO EXCLAIMED WITH HAPPINESS AND DELIGHT
AT THE SIGHT OF THIS BLESSED VALLEY.***

***THEN BOTH BOYS STAGGERED FORWARD OFF THE
SNOW AND SANK ONTO ROCKS BY THE SIDE OF THE
RIVER.***

***THERE, AMID BIRDS AND LIZARDS, THEY PRAYED
ALoud TO GOD, THANKING HIM WITH ALL THE***

***FERVOR OF THEIR YOUTHFUL HEARTS FOR HAVING
RESCUED THEM FROM THE COLD & BARREN GRIP OF
THE ANDES.”***

**DO YOU SEE WHY THIS PSALM MADE ME THINK
OF THIS BOOK?**

**FOR THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN DELIVERED BY
GOD FROM UNSPEAKABLE PAIN & FEAR & SORROW,
THE RESPONSE IS ONE OF UNBRIDLED JOY,
UNSTOPPABLE TEARS OF GRATITUDE & HEARTELT
PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING.**

**EVERY ONE OF US – BECAUSE EVERY ONE OF US
HAS EXPERIENCED PAIN & ANGUISH – HAS CRIED
OUT TO GOD AND, AS THE PSALMIST SAYS, “*HE
DELIVERED THEM IN THEIR DISTRESS.*”**

**YOU KNOW THAT FEELING OF DELIVERANCE
FROM DISTRESS, DON’T YOU?**

**YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT IT IS TO DEPEND ON A
LOVING GOD TO SEE YOU THROUGH DIFFICULT
TIMES.**

**THAT'S SOMETHING TO BE SHARED WITH THOSE
WHO *DON'T* UNDERSTAND IT BECAUSE YOU LONG TO
SEE OTHERS DELIVERED AS YOU HAVE BEEN.**

**THAT WAS CERTAINLY TRUE FOR NANDO
PARRADO & ROBERT CANESSA.**

**OBVIOUSLY, THEY COULDN'T WAIT FOR THEIR
FRIENDS TO BE DELIVERED AS THEY HAD BEEN &
ON DECEMBER 21ST, 1972, 10 WEEKS AFTER THE
ENTIRE ORDEAL IN THE ANDES HAD BEGUN,
HELICOPTERS ARRIVED TO RESCUE THE
REMAINING 14 SURVIVORS WHO WERE TRAPPED IN
THE MOUNTAINS.**

**THEY WERE TAKEN OFF OF THE MOUNTAIN –
DELIVERED OUT OF THE DESERT.**

**LIFE CHANGED FOREVER FOR THEM - NOT ONLY
BECAUSE OF THEIR *ORDEAL* – BUT BECAUSE OF
THEIR *DELIVERANCE* AS WELL.**

**SINCE THAT ORDEAL & DELIVERANCE, ROBERT
CANESSA HAS DEDICATED HIMSELF TO HELPING
OTHERS FACE THEIR OWN DIFFICULT ORDEALS &
EXPERIENCE THEIR OWN MIRACLE OF
DELIVERANCE.**

**TO THIS DAY, HE’S ONE OF URUGUAY’S LEADING
PEDIATRIC CARDIOLOGISTS.**

**NOT LONG AGO, HE TALKED ABOUT THE IMPACT
OF HIS EXPERIENCE OF 45 YEARS AGO ON HIS LIFE
TODAY.**

HE SAID:

***“WHEN I SEE A BABY IN A MOTHER’S WOMB, WITH
HALF OF ITS HEART MISSING, LOOKING THROUGH
THE WINDOW OF THE ULTRASOUND MACHINE IS LIKE
SEEING THE MOON THROUGH THE WINDOW OF THE
PLANE ON TOP OF THAT MOUNTAIN.***

***BUT NOW, I CAN BE THE SHEPHERD WHO CAN
MAKE THIS CHILD SURVIVE.***

IT’S MY REVENGE ON DEATH.

***I TELL THE MOTHER, ‘YOU HAVE A MOUNTAIN TO
CLIMB. I WAS THERE MYSELF. I KNOW HOW YOU
FEEL.***

***BUT THE JOY AND HAPPINESS THAT AWAITS YOU
ON THE OTHER SIDE IS SPECTACULAR.’***

***I WANT TO BE THERE FOR THOSE WHO SUFFER &
DON’T KNOW THAT THERE’S A LIGHT AT THE END OF
THE TUNNEL.”***

YOU KNOW WHAT HE'S TALKING ABOUT, DON'T YOU?

IN YOUR OWN LIFE, YOU CAN LOOK BACK ON TRYING TIMES & KNOW THE MOUNTAIN YOU HAD TO CLIMB.

YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE NOT TO BE ABLE TO SEE THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL.

BUT YOU ALSO KNOW THE JOY & HAPPINESS OF THE OTHER SIDE.

BUT HERE'S THE THING – YOU DON'T JUST KNOW THE JOY & HAPPINESS ON THE OTHER SIDE IN *THIS* LIFE.

YOU KNOW THAT BECAUSE OF CHRIST'S VICTORY OVER DEATH, THERE IS ALSO JOY & HAPPINESS ON THE OTHER SIDE IN THE LIFE TO COME.

YOUR OWN STORY OF SURVIVAL – WHATEVER IT IS – MAY NOT BE AS DRAMATIC AS THAT OF THOSE 16 ANDES SURVIVORS.

NEVERTHELESS, IT’S A STORY OF SURVIVAL, A STORY OF DELIVERANCE & A STORY OF HOPE.

IT’S A STORY YOU NEED TO SHARE SO THAT OTHERS MIGHT ALSO EXPERIENCE THE JOY, THE HAPPINESS & THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL. AMEN.

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