**5th Sunday in Lent – Year C – March 17, 2013 – Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Isaiah 43:16-25 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**Walk with God through this desert life**

*16 This is what the Lord says—he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, 17 who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again,
extinguished, snuffed out like a wick: 18 “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. 19 See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland. 20 The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, 21 the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise. 22 “Yet you have not called on me, Jacob, you have not wearied yourselves for[*[*c*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah%2043&version=NIV#fen-NIV-18528c)*] me, Israel. 23 You have not brought me sheep for burnt offerings, nor honored me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with grain offerings nor wearied you with demands for incense. 24 You have not bought any fragrant calamus for me, or lavished on me the fat of your sacrifices. But you have burdened me with your sins
and wearied me with your offenses. 25 “I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake,
and remembers your sins no more.*

As I studied the lesson from Isaiah 43 this week it reminded me of the most difficult thing I’ve ever done in my life. It was nine years ago. I was serving as vicar at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Salt Lake City, UT. A member of that congregation led an annual trip to the bottom of the Grand Canyon. My father flew out from Milwaukee to make the hike with us. A total of 7 of us began our descent from the northern rim of the canyon, lugging 70 pound rucks on our backs, 100 degree weather, and on that first day we hiked a total of 13 miles and dropped 4800 feet in elevation. There was a stretch during that hike when my father and I were separated. I was hiking at a quicker pace. I stopped and sat down behind a huge boulder to find some rest from the sun. About 30minutes later my father came plugging along. He saw me, plopped down next to me and said, “I’m sure glad you stopped for me. I couldn’t do this alone.” We urged each other on from there until we reached camp, which was located right next to a roaring stream with fresh water.

Hiking through a desert is a lot like life. Every once in a while you find a refreshing spring. You find some rest and it keeps you going. Other times it feels like you’ve traveled a long, long time before you find that respite. I also know that hiking through life is not something that you can do alone. As we study the lesson this morning the Holy Spirit will teach you to **“Walk with God Through This Desert Life.”**

If you trace the history of God’s people from the Garden of Eden up to 700 B.C. at the time of Isaiah, you

will find a number of remarkable events. Time after time God put his awesome power on display. Perhaps at no other time than the time of Moses was this power most evident. Consider all the amazing things that God did — he sent 10 plagues on the Egyptians, which completely devastated a nation. He led two million slaves out of the grip of mighty pharaoh. He split the Red Sea in two, and with one fell swoop drowned the entire army of pharaoh in that Red Sea. While two million people marched through the wilderness of Sinai for 40 years, God provided food and water for those two million people. That’s amazing! He always walked with them, even when they grumbled and complained against him! It is no wonder that the exodus from Egypt was the focal event of God’s people, the cause for celebration, and the reason they celebrated the Passover.

But God had even greater and better things in mind for his people. That’s what he wanted to relay through the prophet Isaiah. **“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. 19See, I am doing a new thing!  Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland. 20The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen,  the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.”**

**“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!”** What could possibly be better? Isaiah shared just what this “new thing” would be in other chapters of his book.

The Israelite people were about a hundred years away from marching through the wilderness again. By 586 B.C. the Babylonian army would destroy the city of Jerusalem, burn the temple to the ground and march the people into exile. They would walk almost 1,000 miles away from their home and live in a foreign land. This was a discipline from God on his people for their sins against him.

But this new and greater thing that God was going to do was to preserve his people. After 70 years God would use the Persian King Darius to allow his people to return. God would save his people, and most importantly, continue the promise of the Messiah. In immediate context, this new and better thing was the saving from exile. But the greater future fulfillment was going to be God sending his Son as the Savior. So God says, “Forget about the past. Forget about Moses. Forget about David. I am doing something new! I’m preserving my people and still sending the Savior.”

In a way I envy the people of Israel. They knew exactly what God was going to do. Even when he was going to allow something bad to happen, they had the promises of their gracious Lord and Savior, promises that would remind them that God would walk with them through these difficult times.

Wouldn’t that be nice? If God were to spell out exactly what will happen… especially with the sequestration? Many of you work as civilians for the Department of Defense and will forced to be furloughed. Not only will this have an impact on the way you budget and live the next… however many months, but it will also impact our community’s economy, and our church’s ability to financially support the gospel ministry. While we walk through this stretch of desert in our life, how will we get through? Will we get through it? We have to wonder about the other patches of desert that we will walk through this next year... yet another deployment, a surgery, the ailing health of a loved one, work that needs to be done on your marriage, a child leaving for college…

All of this marching through the wilderness of life is stressful and weighs down on our souls and hearts, and even our bodies! Like hiking down the Grand Canyon lugging around a 70 pound pack in 100 degree weather. And we don’t always see that fresh spring of water rushing through the desert to refresh us. We don’t always see that there is a pathway through the desert, instead we feel like we are wandering around aimlessly. At times, we are tempted not to trust God, that he will strengthen us to get through it. We become afraid and anxious. We stress out and worry. Then we burden God with our lack of faith in him.

The same thing happened with God and the people of Israel. In our lesson God provided a laundry list of things the Israelites were doing wrong, like a teacher who writes the names of the misbehaving students on a whiteboard. And then he said in vs24 **“You have burdened me with your sins and wearied me with your offenses.”** Imagine a huge whiteboard, like the one we use in the fellowship hall for Bible class. Imagine God writing down everything you have done wrong, every sin, every time you’ve worried, were anxious, fearful about the future. I don’t think they make a whiteboard big enough for me, how about you?

But in spite of our sins, listen to what your God has done for you, **“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”** (vs25) Imagine again that huge whiteboard, with the list of your sins, and God wiping away the entire list. That is what he has done, because of his son Jesus, who walked through the desert of life all by himself, who came to burden himself with your sins and mine.

Our sin is not something we can bear, nor could we ever help Jesus bear them. Jesus alone must carry the burden of our sins, and he did, all the way through the desert, where Satan tempted him and tried to get Jesus to drop that load of sin. But Jesus carried that burden of our sins, all by himself, all the way to the cross, where he bore the burden of our death because of our sins. On that cross Jesus shed his precious, innocent blood, and with that blood God the Father erased all of your sins from your whiteboard. **“For my sake,”** God says. Because of my love for you, not because of what you have done, but because of what my Son has done for you.

As we trudge through this desert life, we stumble upon springs of water that give refreshment. These words of God, these promises are those bubbling brooks. Your baptism, which you recall each and every day are those streams of waters. The Holy Supper, which your Savior offers to you again and again, is the stream in the wasteland that refreshes you. Through his promises God reminds you that you are not walking through this desert by yourself. He reminds you that he walks with you. He reminds you that you will have the strength to walk it, because he, through these precious means, his Word and Sacrament, will strengthen you, he will comfort you. He will show you that there is an end to this pathway through the desert – that end is paradise.

Not only has God erased all of your sins from your whiteboard but he has put your name on his whiteboard and put a star next to it…. just like we do in Bible study when someone supplies a stellar answer to a question. Only God writes your name in his book of life, because Jesus has provided the answer to the burden of your sin – his death. And by his resurrection from the dead, on Easter Sunday, Jesus gives us hope as we trudge through this desert life.

On our hike along the bottom of the Grand Canyon we hiked along the Colorado River, (this was the third out of five days), and there was a point when we had to hike back up, several hundred feet above the River. We had hiked in and out of cove after cove. The thermometer on our rucks red 115. My father had just run out of water, and we didn’t know how much further it was until the next camp. We had to hike up another hill. But at the crest we heard it – the sound of a fresh water spring running down the middle of the canyon. My dad looked at me and smiled, and then began to run down the trail toward camp, his ruck slamming into his back, knees aching, lungs burning, but knowing that he could stick his head into that stream and he’d be ok.

We know that this life will be difficult. There will times that we wish that our walk would be over and done with. But we will continue to march forward, knowing that God will strengthen us. He will keep our eyes fixed on that place where the River of Life runs through the city, where the Tree of Life stands with its fruit for all to eat, and our Savior lifts the burden off of our souls and says, “Forget about the former things. See, I have done a new thing for you! Come and rest from your labors forever!” May God give you the strength to walk through this desert life, to walk with God as you drink his Word and Sacraments, until we all reach the blessed place of eternal rest. Amen.