Have you ever noticed the way Jesus took the most ordinary objects and attached extraordinary meaning to them?

He talked about good seed and bad soil and the next thing we know, he challenges the receptivity of our hearts to the message of God. He talked about weeds to confront our priorities and treatment of others. He talked about catching fish, and he ended up calling his disciples to preach and teach the good news of God's Messiah come. Over and over again, Jesus used everyday objects to teach eternal truths.

When significance is added to the ordinary, normal living becomes a bit more sacred.

Jesus did the same for us when he assigned new meaning to the bread and the cup of Communion. Both were part of the Jewish feast that Jesus was celebrating with his disciples. And they were normal, everyday components of daily living. Beginning on the night of the Last Supper, however, their significance for Christians forever changed.

Jesus broke the bread and said, “Take and eat; this is my body” (Matthew 26:26). Then he took the cup and said, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (vv. 27, 28). His disciples may not have fully grasped Jesus’ teaching, but they soon would. It was the night of Jesus’ betrayal. A few hours later, he was beaten, crucified, and buried. He bled and died for them. Later, when the disciples met together to remember Jesus’ loving sacrifice and to give thanks, the bread and the wine represented Jesus’ body and blood.

Acts 2:42 says “the breaking of the bread” became one of the common and distinctive practices of the early church. We know Jesus as our resurrected Lord and Savior, so we Christians today still follow his instructions. And just like that, a bit of bread and a small cup of juice are transformed from tidbits into symbols of Jesus’ courageous love for us.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. STORY

1. Find me in Exodus 16
2. Back in 2012, Erica and I traveled to Austria for a mission trip with Hause Edleweise.
3. While waiting in Indy airport, we were told something was wrong with plane. Phalange.
4. Rerouted through Chicago, layover in Frankfurt, Germany - 4-hour layover.
5. You've left home behind, not where you are headed. Stuck in the in-between.

B. HOOK

1. That's how the Bile describes God's people.
   a) The Israelites are not where they were
   b) They are not where they are going
   c) Stuck.
2. But you know, that's how the Bible describes you and me.
3. **We are living in the wilderness.**

C. SERIES

1. Continuing our sermon series...

D. TODAY'S MESSAGE

1. Today we see three moments of weakness in the Israelites as they cry out for water, then food, then water again.
2. The wilderness reveals their fears, demands dependence, and reveals God's presence.
3. FEARS, DEPENDENCE, PRESENCE.

E. PRAYER

1. Heavenly Father, we praise your name. You are always faithful. You are always present. You are always right. But our sinful flesh causes us to question you, test you, and just complain. I pray that today you open our eyes to see how we are a people in the wilderness. That we are journeying with you from the moment of rescue to the moment of arrival. May our faith find dependence on you. May our hopes find strength in you. As always, I pray that the meditation of my heart is acceptable in your sight. You are our rock. You are our redeemer. Reveal your glory in this place. God's people said, Amen.

II. THE WILDERNESS EXPOSES OUR FEARS

A. THE STORY

1. **READ EXODUS 16:1-3**
2. Jumping into the story
   a) Came up out of the Red Sea and started complaining about lack of water
   b) Moses makes it sweet
   c) Now in the next region, the wilderness of sin... ironic.. people complaining again. Food.
3. Redeemed from Egypt but not yet reached the promised land
   a) Before your judgment, remember your layover in the terminal
   b) Israelites come to Moses, what are we supposed to do out here?
   c) Off the path, middle of nowhere, no Kroger,
   d) Moses, what are we going to do?
   e) Anyone have preteens?
      (1) Murmuring... talking back, but not confident in it.
      (2) "If only we had died by the hand of the lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."
      (3) Talk about your complaints.
4. The in-between space is precisely where their fears emerge.
   a) Slavery was familiar; it's what they understood. They don't understand this
   b) When people see a lack of options, ANXIETY creeps in
   c) Fear has a strange effect on our memory... romanticizing where we've been.
      (1) Did they really have pots of meat? Doubt it was a Golden Corral.
      (2) Pharaoh sacrificed their sons, made their labor relentless. They cried out to God for deliverance.
      (3) But now they are hungry and they recall Egypt as a JW Marriot when in reality it was a Raintree Inn... you know what I mean?
   d) They know what God did back there. They know where God is leading them. It's where their feet are now that is causing them to test the Lord.

B. THE POINT

1. Are we really so different?
   a) We know we are free from death, but we also know this isn't heaven.
   b) WE BELIEVE WHAT GOD DID IN THE PAST. WE TRUST GOD WITH OUR ETERNITY, BUT SOMETIMES STRUGGLE TO TRUST HIM WITH OUR TODAY.
2. The today is the challenge before us all.
3. The today is where we are challenged to walk by faith and not by sight.
4. The Today is all we are tasked with.
5. Yet we quickly turn to panic and desperation.

C. APPLICATION

1. Fear wants tomorrow's answers today

a) When you look around your life right now, what answers of tomorrow about tomorrow are you wanting today?
   (1) Food runs out?
   (2) Can't find water?
   (3) Lose my job?
   (4) Money runs out?
   (5) Problems at work?
   (6) Before long, we're experiencing the emotional weight of a future that hasn't happened yet.
   (7) Because we struggle to trust God with today.

2. Fear mistakes lack of sight for lack of provision

a) Narrows our focus so intensely we can't see anything else
b) Israelites only see sand, rocks, wilderness.
c) No crops, no food, no water.
d) Their conclusion makes perfect sense if what they can see is all that is.
e) That's the problem
   (1) They couldn't see how God could provide
   (2) That's being human
   (3) We panic
   (4) We demand answers
   (5) We want the details
f) Faith isn't pretending the wilderness isn't a wilderness
g) Faith looks at the same wilderness and remembers there is something - or, more importantly, someone we cannot see.
h) READ 2 Corinthians 5:7 "For we live by faith, not by sight"
i) The problem is not their hunger
j) The problem is not their thirst.
k) Their problem is allowing what they see to determine what they believe.

D. TRANSITION

1. Church, we face a wilderness every day, but what we can't always see is how this time in the wilderness is forming us into people who depend on God first and ourselves second.
2. Let's jump back into the story and see how the wilderness demands dependence.

III. THE WILDERNESS DEMANDS DEPENDENCE

A. THE STORY

1. READ EXODUS 16:10-12

a) Explain the daily provision of manna and quail.
b) Only for that day. It will rot or get worms and bugs in it.
c) Friday, they can collect for Saturday... rest in God's provision.

2. READ EXODUS 16:31-32

B. INTERPRETATION

1. Notice that God gives Grace before he gives the law
   a) GRACE. Rescued them from Egypt, carried them through the Red Sea, gave them bread from heaven, water from the rock, and quail to eat. All before the Law.
      (1) See this... Grace always comes before the demand.
      (2) This story feels a bit out of place, at least in the details.
      (3) It says to put the manna in a jar to put in the ark, but the ark has not been built yet. It has never been mentioned before.
   b) There is a bigger story here... deliverance, blessing, blessing, blessing, law.
2. Exodus 16 reminds us that the Old Testament is about grace. Unmerited favor
3. God says, I've rescued you, I've sustained you; now let me show you how my redeemed people live.
   a) Come into the family; now let me show you how to live as family.

C. THE POINT

1. Before God gave Israel commands, God gave Israel their daily bread
2. What this story shows us is that
3. **GOD'S PROVISION PRECEDES YOUR OBEDIENCE.**
4. God didn't say, here's this law; obey this, and then I will save you.
5. Obedience is Israel's response to a God who has already provided.

D. APPLICATION

1. Hard part of this story is ... It's daily bread

a) The Manna is DAILY bread. Not bi-weekly bread, not monthly bread, daily
b) Could have given them all they needed up front, but didn't.
c) Every morning they had to trust God would send the manna.
d) God wasn't just feeding Israel; he was forming Israel.
e) Teaching dependence.
f) What is Spiritual Formation?
g) It's maturing in your dependence on God.

2. Spiritual formation doesn't mean learning how to be holy apart from God.
   a) Spiritual formation is learning that there is no life apart from God.
   b) Jesus' words in the Lord's Prayer: give us this day our daily... bread.
      (1) Give me bread for today
      (2) Give me today's strength

(3) Give me today's wisdom
(4) Give me today's patience
(5) Give me today's courage
(6) Give me today's provision.
(7) Give me the grace I need to faithfully follow you today.
(8) Then tomorrow morning, I'll come back and ask again.

3. That connects directly to what we saw earlier. Fear wants tomorrow's answers today. Faith trusts God for bread today.
   a) Some of us are exhausted because we are carrying tomorrow with today's strength.
   b) We want to know...
   c) God doesn't always give us those answers.
   d) Sometimes he simply gives us enough manna for today and says, "Trust me. I'll still be here tomorrow."

E. TRANSITION

1. We are dependent people. We need God for bread. We need God for strength. We need God for the next Step. But sometimes what we need reminded of most is a reminder that we need God's presence.
2. The wilderness reveals God's presence.

IV. THE WILDERNESS REVEALS GOD'S PRESENCE

A. THE STORY - EXODUS 17

1. Look back with me to something we overlooked
   a) Before the manna or quail, Moses and Aaron tell the people
      (1) READ EXODUS 16:6-7 - God's presence
      (2) READ EXODUS 16:10 - Glory of Yahweh.
   b) They look toward the wilderness
      (1) The very place they fear, have grown to hate, are tired of, and have no provision for... what do they see?
      (2) The glory of Yahweh
   c) "Glory of Yahweh" - The first time in the Bible we've seen this phrase.
      (1) This is significant.
         (a) Not in Egypt
         (b) Not at Mt. Sinai
         (c) Not at the Tabernacle or Ark of the Covenant
      (2) But what is glory?
         (a) Israel feels lost in the wilderness, questioning everything
         (b) Then comes Exodus 16:10 - Glory of Yahweh.
         (c) There surrounded by everything they DON'T have, Aaron speaks.
         (d) Look to the wilderness. . . there in the cloud is the glory.
         (e) The God who... sent plagues, punished Pharaoh, split the sea...
      (3) KAVOD - say kavod...
         (a) Root meaning is weight. Or heaviness.
         (b) But not physical weight... emotional and spiritual weight.
         (c) We give weight to whatever we believe has the greatest power or influence over us.
         (d) Think about it
            i) A doctor's diagnosis can weigh heavily on us.
            ii) A financial crisis can weigh heavily on us
            iii) A broken relationship can weigh heavily on us
            iv) An uncertain future can weigh heavily on us.
            v) These things have weight because they matter... to us.
         (e) But what happens when the weight of your circumstances meets the weight of God's glory?
            i) Israel's hunger was real; fear was real; uncertainty? Real.
            ii) But none of those things was greater than the God standing before them.
            iii) Weight is what draws our focus, emotions, spirits.
            iv) And in this moment... all the other stuff melts away.
            v) And there is God... in his glory.
         (f) Who here needs the weight of God to overshadow the weight of your burdens?
            i) He is here....

2. But the story isn't finished
   a) By chapter 17, they have food, but a new problem: no water.
   b) Once again they complain.
   c) READ EXODUS 17:4 - Moses, scared, cries out to God.
   d) READ EXODUS 17:6 - God says he will be standing there
      (1) Moses strikes the rock, water comes out, people drink
      (2) And then we're finally told the question underneath all of their questions.
   e) READ EXODUS 17:7 - Look at what they name it.
      (1) That's the question underneath bread, water, fear. God, are you here?

B. INTERPRETATION

1. "Is the Lord among us or not?
   a) Interpret the wilderness as God's absence
   b) No food: maybe God isn't with us
   c) No water: Maybe God has abandoned us
   d) Hardship: Maybe God brought us this far and left us here.
   e) But look at what GOd says immediately before that question is written...
      (1) I will be standing before you there on the rock.
      (2) Israel asks Where is God?
      (3) God says, I'm standing right here.
         (a) Can't see where the water will come from, survive, promised land. But God never left them.

2. Israel keeps asking for God's provision, but God keeps revealing his presence.
   a) The greatest thing God can give Israel is his presence. It's himself.

C. THE POINT

1. THE WILDERNESS DOESN'T SIGNAL GOD'S ABSENCE;
2. IT REVEALS GOD'S PRESENCE.

D. APPLICATION

1. How often do we ask the same question? Is the LORD among us or not?
   a) It may not come out this way, but we do ask it. It sounds like
   b) Where are you? Why haven't you? Why am I? Why hasn't the diagnosis changed? Why hasn't the relationship been restored? Why hasn't the door opened?

2. We look at the wilderness around us and conclude that if God were really here, surely the wilderness would be.
   a) Exodus gives us a different picture
   b) The wilderness is not evidence of God's absence.
   c) Israel looked toward the wilderness and saw the glory of God.
   d) Moses walked toward a barren rock and found God standing there
   e) Maybe we don't need to be removed from the wilderness
   f) Maybe what we need is to see God in the wilderness with us.

3. **Because notice what God does NOT do in Exodus 16 and 17.**
    a) He does not teleport Israel to the Promised Land
    b) He does not expedite their journey.
    c) They are still in the wilderness after the manna
    d) They are still in the wilderness after the water from the rock.
    e) But now they know they are not alone.

4. **And that changes the wilderness**
    a) Maybe you've been praying, "God, get me out of here."
    b) And perhaps God will... but maybe he won't.
    c) Maybe a prayer we need to learn is
    d) "God, show me where you are in this."
    e) Because the greatest promise of the Christian life isn't that God's people will never walk through the wilderness.
    f) It's that we will never walk through it alone.

V. LANDING

A. All this points us forward to Jesus.

1. Centuries later, Jesus looked at a crowd of hungry people and said I am the bread of life."
2. Israel received manna, bread from heaven. Jesus says he is a better, life-giving bread from heaven."

B. Then Paul looks back at Israel wandering through the wilderness

1. **Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-4**
2. See where this Exodus story is pointing us? To JESUS!
3. God gave them bread, water, but his greatest gift is his presence.
4. Jesus is the bread of life.
5. Living in him nourishes us for today.

C. But when you look around, this Ain't heaven, is it?

1. So that tells me we are living in the wilderness.
2. **We have started our journey with Jesus spiritually, but we have not entered the promised land, have we?**
3. We are living between our redemption and our restoration.
4. We are walking through the wilderness.
5. And that means there will be days when we are afraid.
6. There will be days when we don't know where tomorrow's bread is coming from.
7. There will be days when we look around and ask the same question Israel asked:
8. **Is the LORD among us or not?**

D. They had the pillar of fire before them to guide them in the wilderness.

1. They had the shekinah cloud of glory on the mountaintop.
2. **BUT We have the Holy Spirit.**
3. The fire that came down from heaven at Pentecost now lives inside us, leading us into all righteousness.
4. So yes we live in the wilderness but we have God with us.
5. Not in a cloud.
6. Not in a tabernacle
7. Not even in the flesh of Jesus
8. But in us. God in us
9. Through the Holy Spirit

E. Prayer

1. Heavenly Father, I ask that you be with us in the wilderness. Let us see the shekinah glory all around us because you are inside us. Reveal your presence to us when we are lost or questioning. Help us understand our place in this world, our journey with your son, and the promised land before us. Embolden us to invite others into the wilderness with us so that we might help them find you. We thank you for your Spirit and his guidance. AMEN

Congregational Vote of Affirmation - There will be a vote TODAY directly after the service to affirm the elder's selection of Tabitha Lumpkin as the new Student Ministry Director. NLCC members over the age of 18 may vote.

Operation Christmas Child Kick-Off - Boxes, labels and instructions are available in both foyers TODAY and unsealed boxes need to be returned by November 8 please. **NLCC covers the $10 postage per box.**

Outdoor Movie Night - Friday, October 16, 7 pm, *The Prince of Egypt,* popcorn and drinks provided. Bring a lawn chair and blanket.

Men's Cookout - October 17, 6:00 pm at the pavilion. Please sign up if you plan to attend.

Praise Night - Wednesday, October 28.