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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH
ELKHORN, NEBRASKA
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1 PASTOR WENDA FRY: Mountains have always played a
2 major role in God dealing with his people.

3 And when we look at the different mountains that are
4 in the Bible, we see that on almost every occasion God has
5 revealed himself to his people and helped them to understand
6 one more part of how he wants us to live.

7 Our theme verse for Lent verse for is Isaiah 2:3,
8 and that says:

9 "Come, let's climb God's mountain," and the rest of
10 it, this is in the Message Bible, the rest of that verse
11 says, "Let's go to the house of the God of Jacob, he'll show
12 us the way he works, so we can live the way we're made."

13 In the Bible mountains are places where God reveals
14 how he wants us to live as his people.

15 Last week Pastor Mark talked about Mt. Moriah, and
16 that was the place where Abraham put an altar there and he
17 named it God will provide.

18 Because what God did on Mt. Moriah is he provided a
19 way for Abraham to be faithful in his test and through his
20 trial.

21 He was asked to take his son and go up on Mt. Moriah
22 and sacrifice his son.

23 When he got up there he didn't know that's what he
24 was going to do, but when he looked up, just before he was
25 going to sacrifice his son, there was a ram caught in the

1 thicket, and so that's why he made an altar to God there and
2 said God is the provider, he will provide.

3 Then we talked about the fact that most probably we
4 would be tested in the upcoming week.

5 I don't know if you are remembering that now, how
6 God provided for you, but we prayed that you would have a way
7 through that testing, whatever that was this week, whether it
8 was at your work, or in your family, or in your marriage, we
9 prayed and had a blessing for that time of testing.

10 But on Mt. Moriah God showed Abraham that he wants
11 him to live trusting him; that he'll provide in every trial
12 and every temptation.

13 So that is what happens on the major Biblical
14 mountains.

15 God always shows one more thing about the way he
16 wants us to live as his people.

17 And it's the same with Mt. Sinai. That's what we
18 are going to look at today.

19 Mt. Sinai is sometimes called Mt. Horeb in the
20 Bible.

21 It's often referred to as Mt. Horeb in the Book of
22 Deuteronomy.

23 But even in Exodus 17 it talks about Mt. Horeb, and
24 that means the same thing as Mt. Sinai.

25 When the Israelites left Egypt via the Red Sea they

1 traveled for three months before they arrived at Mt. Sinai.

2 The text we are going to look at today is as they
3 reach Mt. Sinai.

4 So I invite you to get your Bibles out. Do you have
5 your Bibles? Lift them high if you are bringing your Bibles.

6 Excellent. That's just excellent, that you are
7 bringing your Bibles.

8 We want you to do that, and you probably get tired
9 of us saying that this year, but every Sunday we are going to
10 be talking about bringing your Bible, because we want you to
11 work this living word into your life and become so familiar
12 with it that it's something that you need throughout the
13 week.

14 And then you come back to worship and we learn
15 together again and make notes and let the word get worked
16 into our lives.

17 Exodus, Chapter 19, Verses 1 to 9 I'm going to read.
18 This is the Israelites.

19 They reach Mt. Sinai. This just before Chapter 20,
20 which is the giving of the Ten Commandments, but we are going
21 not going to look at that today; we are going to look at what
22 happens, how God prepares the people before he gives them the
23 law. Exodus 19, verses 1 to 9.

24 "On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone
25 out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into

1 the wilderness of Sinai.

2 "They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the
3 wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness. Israel
4 camped there in front of the mountain.

5 "Then Moses went up to God. The Lord called to him
6 from the mountain saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of
7 Jacob, and tell the Israelites, you have seen what I did to
8 the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought
9 you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep
10 my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all
11 the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall
12 be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are
13 the words you shall speak to the Israelites.'

14 "So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people,
15 and set before them all these words that the Lord had
16 commanded him.

17 "The people all answered as one, 'Everything that
18 the Lord has spoken we will do.'

19 "Moses reported the words of the people to the
20 Lord.

21 "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'I am going to come to
22 you in a dense cloud, in order that the people may hear when
23 I speak with you and so trust you ever after.'"

24 We are going to pause right there. We are going to
25 look at some more of Exodus 19 as we go along today.

1 But I'm going to pause there because I want to lift
2 up this wilderness time. I want to talk just a little bit
3 about this wilderness time.

4 What happens to God's people in the wilderness is
5 that it's a time of transition.

6 They have left Egypt, remember, through the Red Sea
7 and the miracle of that dry land that they could walk across.

8 And God promised them that they would be given
9 freedom in the new place, in the new land, the land of
10 Canaan, called the promised land, a couple of different ways
11 to speak about that.

12 So the wilderness is really a time of transition for
13 God's people, transition between being enslaved in Egypt and
14 being free in the new land, and they are right in the middle
15 of that.

16 So, for example, Verse 1 of Chapter 19 says, "On the
17 third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land
18 of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness,"
19 we know they have been in the wilderness three months,
20 because it says only the third new moon, because there is a
21 new moon every month.

22 So they have been out there three months, and they
23 are almost ready to come to Mt. Sinai, and this is where they
24 are camping.

25 And the interesting part about the wilderness time

1 is that God performs many miracles of protection and
2 sustenance, and while he does that, the people murmur. While
3 he provides, they complain.

4 It's kind of this constant interplay between God's
5 miracles and the people's murmuring.

6 So what I would like you to do is flip back in your
7 Bible, probably some of you are going to have different
8 headings, in the pew Bible it would be page 61, but I want
9 you to look at the headings at the top, and maybe you have
10 different ones in your Bible.

11 But this Bible says crossing the Red Sea at the top
12 of page 61.

13 Maybe you have something different, but this shows
14 us the important events that happened in the wilderness.

15 If you turn to page 62, you will see at the top of
16 that, the pursuers drown.

17 Again, God is providing protection for his people
18 through that miracle.

19 On page 63, bitter water made sweet. They get out
20 and through the dry land and the sea falls in afterwards and
21 the people start traveling and they start complaining that
22 they are thirsty, and they taste the water and they start
23 complaining to Moses, it's bitter.

24 And so he says to the Lord, can you give us some
25 water to drink?

1 So bitter water made sweet is the time when God gave
2 Moses a staff and he touched the water and they could drink
3 all they wanted.

4 Page 64, bread from heaven. Again, another miracle.
5 They were out in this wilderness that looked like this
6 picture.

7 It doesn't look like there is going to be much of
8 anything out there and there wasn't.

9 So God provided bread from heaven, enough for every
10 day, and some of the people got greedy and they would hoard
11 it.

12 And then the Bible says that it turned wormy and
13 spoiled and they couldn't eat it.

14 So while God was over, against all of the provision
15 that God would make, the people would not do what he said.
16 They wouldn't be obedient

17 They would say we will just take matters into our
18 own hands and save a little extra here, and they complained.

19 Why did you bring us out here? We liked it better
20 when we had leeks and onions and pomegranates.

21 Even though God is providing, over against his
22 provision, they complained. They didn't like any of it.

23 So that's what they have been doing for three months
24 and now the Israelites reach Mt. Sinai.

25 That's where we are at, page 66 in the pew Bibles,

1 Exodus 19.

2 What we see is, over against the miracles, the
3 people murmur. God provides and they complain.

4 So it's a time for the Israelites, the people, utter
5 helplessness, discontent, rebellion.

6 And for God it's a time of great and divine and
7 miraculous sustenance and protection.

8 I point that out because that's what makes the words
9 and actions of what is in the text today so remarkable.

10 Because what God says to Moses is, look with me at
11 Verse 4, he reminds them that they were in enslaved.

12 "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I
13 bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now
14 therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you
15 shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples."

16 In spite of what they've done, God still wants to
17 choose people as his own.

18 Last week Mark introduced us to a Biblical scholar
19 named Bruce Feiler and he does a great series called "Walking
20 the Bible".

21 If you have not seen it, we highly recommend it, but
22 I am going to show a piece right now about Mt. Sinai.

23 This helps a little bit for us to see in our
24 contemporary world what we are talking about as we read the
25 Bible.

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(Excerpt Played)

It's a holy place. Mt. Sinai has always been a holy place, and what the father said there was that when we come to a holy place, we open our hand for the gift, if we are willing to receive the gift.

What happened at Mt. Sinai was a pure gift. A pure gift.

I don't think the Israelites deserved to be called treasured possessions. They whined and moaned and complained.

What is that saying? They would done that if they were hung with a new rope. Is that the saying?

That's the kind of grumbling and murmuring the Israelites did. God provided and it was never good enough.

I don't think they deserved to be called a treasured possession, and yet God chooses them, and this is why it's remarkable.

In spite of that, he chooses them. He says I want a people.

Remember what Bruce Feiler says, what shall I look for? What shall I listen for?

God's revelation can never be predicted, but something holy happened on that mountain, and something holy happens every time we open ourselves to the idea that we don't deserve to be called a treasured possession. They

1 didn't and we don't.

2 In Verse 6 of 19, God wants this so much, he says
3 you shall be for me, he even amplifies it, he calls them a
4 treasured possession, he says you are going to be a priestly
5 kingdom and holy nation.

6 And then Moses summons the people and he tells them
7 what God told him.

8 And I find it amazing what the people say, after
9 everything they have been through, they say in Verse 8, tell
10 the Lord that we will do, they answered as one, everything
11 that the Lord has spoken, we will do.

12 How is that God could elicit a response like that
13 after everything they had been through together?

14 Because God knows our hearts, and he knows that when
15 we know that we have not done the right thing, when we know
16 we have not said the right thing, or we haven't done what God
17 has asked us to do, we know that in our hearts, and God knows
18 that.

19 And then someone calls us special, we know we have
20 been given a special chance.

21 I think that's what happened to the Israelites here.
22 They knew they had complained against God, but he knew their
23 hearts, and he called them special.

24 And when you've done something wrong and someone
25 calls you special you know you're getting a second chance in

1 life, or in that relationship, or in that family, or in that
2 job.

3 In Verse 9 God says to Moses, let's look at that,
4 "I'm going to come to you in a dense cloud in order that the
5 people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever
6 after."

7 God always backs up his words with something that we
8 can see and hear and touch.

9 That's how much he wants to choose us. That's how
10 much he loves us.

11 He wants to tell us how much he loves us, call us a
12 pet name like treasured possession, and then back it up with
13 things that we can see and hear.

14 I am going to come in a dense cloud, you are going
15 to be able to see it, and you will be able to hear, because I
16 will reveal myself.

17 And he does that then at the end of Chapter 20,
18 Verses 16 to 19, I think it's called the Sinai theophany.

19 This is the Sinai theophany, which literally means
20 God seen, and here is how God was seen.

21 Verse 16, "On the morning of the third day there was
22 thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud on the
23 mountain, and a blast of the trumpet so loud that all the
24 people who were in the camp trembled.

25 "Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet

1 God. They took their stand at the foot of the mountain.

2 "Mt. Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had
3 descended upon it in fire. The smoke went up like the smoke
4 of a kiln while the whole mountain shook violently.

5 "As the blast of the trumpet grew louder and louder
6 Moses would speak and God would answer him in thunder."

7 Many of you know that I grew up in Montana and one
8 of the things that was really fun to do in the summer time,
9 we would spend two or three or four weeks in the northeast
10 corner of the Montana, that's where my grandparents lived,
11 it's called the high line, and up on the high line the
12 storms, the thunderstorms, are called electrical storms.

13 And when a storm would begin to roll in mom and dad
14 would yell, "Kids, get the popcorn. There's going to be a
15 show."

16 And we would go out and sit under the porch and
17 watch the electrical storm roll in.

18 A fantastic display of lightning and pink and yellow
19 and gray.

20 I thought of that when I read this Sinai theophany.
21 I thought about those electrical storms up there.

22 God speaks to his people, gives them something to
23 see, so that they can believe that they're a treasured
24 possession.

25 And he gives them something they can hear, the

1 thunder, so they can believe that they are a treasured
2 possession.

3 And in Chapter 20 he gives something they can
4 actually touch, which are the two tablets.

5 So always God backs up his love for us with
6 something that we can see, hear, and touch.

7 That's how God solidified the covenant for the
8 people of Israel.

9 That's how our God is. He want us to see and hear
10 and touch his love.

11 So when we come to this time in the year where we
12 get ready for Easter, we put a cross that reminds of
13 Mt. Calvary always in our midst somewhere, some form of
14 Mt. Calvary.

15 We put it there because we remember, like we did
16 last week when we had Holy Communion, we remember that Jesus
17 Christ is the New Covenant.

18 So in Jesus and this cross, what Jesus did on that
19 cross fulfilled the reconciliation that began on Mt. Sinai.

20 I think that's just incredible, the connection, God
21 has always wanted a people.

22 He has always wanted a treasured possession, people
23 that would love him with as much devotion and passion as he
24 loves us.

25 I think that is just so awesome to be connected to

1 that covenant.

2 That's what we say every time we lift the cup. This
3 cup is the New Covenant, meaning the one that was begun on
4 Mt. Sinai.

5 This is the fulfilling of that reconciliation that
6 had begun on Mt. Sinai.

7 The Israelites are people like us. We're like them
8 a lot.

9 God gives us so much, doesn't he? We often find
10 ourselves complaining that we need more or we want more.

11 But God chooses us, not because of what we've done,
12 he just chooses us, even after we've complained, he chooses
13 us.

14 Even after we think that we deserve something else,
15 he chooses us.

16 He keeps choosing us and choosing us, because he has
17 given us a new covenant through the sacred blood of Jesus
18 Christ.

19 I want to read to you from the message Bible in
20 First Peter. First Peter, Chapter 1.

21 Listen to these words about this the way Peter talks
22 about how God chooses us as a treasured possession, because I
23 want you to hear that today.

24 In spite of what you've done or not done this past
25 week, or in your life, you are a treasured possession, and he

1 chooses, he has always wanted a people to love and to serve
2 him.

3 On Wednesday Lowell, Lowell is our newest member of
4 the pastoral team and he spoke on Psalm 124, which was about
5 God's deliverance and help.

6 And he was very poignant, I thought, he was very
7 clear in that there is no other help in all the world like
8 God.

9 And he challenged us to be able to articulate how it
10 is in our life that God has helped us. That was his
11 challenge.

12 And here is First Peter 5. I want you to think of
13 that as I read this.

14 "You call out to God for help and he helps. He's a
15 good father that way, but don't forget he's also a
16 responsible father and he won't let you get by with sloppy
17 living.

18 "Your life is a journey you must travel with a deep
19 consciousness of God.

20 "It cost God plenty to get you out of that dead-end
21 empty-headed life you grew up in.

22 "He paid with Christ's sacred blood, you know. He
23 died like an unblemished sacrificial lamb, and this was no
24 afterthought. God always knew he was going to do this for
25 you.

1 It's because of this sacrificed Messiah, whom God
2 then raised from the dead and glorified, that you trust God
3 and that you know you have a future in God."

4 Here is the part.

5 "You are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high
6 calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people.

7 "God's instruments to do his work and speak out for
8 him, to tell others of the night and day difference he made
9 for you, from nothing to something, from rejected to
10 accepted."

11 Lowell challenged us to prepare our stories, our
12 personal stories, that's really what he did, so that we could
13 tell others about the night and day difference that God makes
14 in our lives.

15 He wanted us to prepare that story, and I was saying
16 to the 7:45 people, sometimes we may have to practice it in
17 our homes with the blinds closed.

18 Just speak out loud. Just try it in front of a
19 mirror, or not in front of a mirror, but just speak it out
20 loud what God has done, what difference God has made in your
21 life, because apart from God we really have no other help.

22 We are a treasured possession. We don't deserve it.
23 Isn't it remarkable that we are still called a treasured
24 possession?

25 He chooses us this day to be his people. This is

1 the kind of God we have.

2 Mark, I'll invite you to lead us in a response.

3 Thank you.

4 PASTOR MARK FRY: I was struck by two things, Wenda.

5 Thank you.

6 Sinai, I never noticed the word sin is in there, and
7 I never connected the covenants like that.

8 I had a phone conversation yesterday with my sister
9 that was very troubling to me.

10 I don't know why I am sharing this, but I think it's
11 relevant.

12 We have a very small parcel of land in Iowa and
13 since my grandmother died my sister is kind of the executor
14 of it, and my sister is a pre-Christian person, and I love
15 her greatly.

16 But the people that have been managing the farm for
17 us have been taking advantage of that.

18 They have been shortchanging the amount of money
19 that they pay.

20 So she said it's really hard, they live in a small
21 community, and now people are coming up to her, we have got
22 another guy who is helping intervene, and they always play
23 the Christian card.

24 They say, "You don't want to get rid of him. He's a
25 Christian."

1 And my sister, whenever she tells me that story,
2 which she just told me for the first time yesterday, there is
3 a little bit of an arrow there, you are a Christian, too, and
4 this is the way Christians. You are less than ethical,
5 you're less than honest.

6 And I'm like, yes, it really bothers me when
7 Christian people are being inconsistent in their faith, and
8 she goes, I bet it does.

9 I don't know, but my sense of that is people
10 misunderstand what it means to be a treasured possession, and
11 they take advantage of that.

12 It's interesting, because right after God says that
13 to them, he says I want you to have some boundaries, some
14 limits, my translation.

15 Here's, I guess, my response and I would invite
16 everyone to just maybe think in your heart, you know, maybe
17 you've transgressed your own boundaries, or the boundaries
18 God has for you.

19 And maybe you've been a little less than ethical.
20 Maybe you've murmured or grumbled.

21 I know I have. I have been complaining about my
22 cold.

23 It's the way we're wired, but God keeps reaching out
24 to us and he keeps saying, you know, maybe it's because we
25 are missing that first part, you are a treasured possession.

1 It started with the Noah covenant and the Abraham
2 covenant, now it's the Mosaic covenant and the law.

3 My response is to pray about those commandments, I
4 guess that we'll break them, but that doesn't mean they
5 aren't important.

6 I just hated that, that somebody has been stealing
7 from us, and I don't want them to be sent to prison or
8 anything, but it's sad that they stole from us and they said
9 that they are Christians, so let's pray on that if we could,
10 maybe.

11 Lord, I know it's so difficult, and yet so simple to
12 live in relationship with you.

13 As they say, if you had a refrigerator, our picture
14 would be on it.

15 We are like those little preschool students that
16 just have those beautiful faces.

17 That's the way you see us, Lord, and you just
18 nurture us and you tend us into your future.

19 You're just like Ms. Verna and Ms. JoAnn as you love
20 on us.

21 Lord, as we age sometimes, we go in different
22 directions.

23 Sometimes we are cruel to the other students.
24 Sometimes, Lord, we then deny it, and we think that it's all
25 about us, we murmur and we want more, more, more.

1 And yet, Lord, in those darkest of nights we really
2 do know that what we really want more of is you.

3 So, Lord, thank you for our hearts. Thank you,
4 Lord, for the ability you give us to respond.

5 We open our hands, we open our hearts, Lord, and we
6 would ask that we might found faithful of giving them back
7 and giving away that which you first have given us, the
8 forgiveness of our sins, and the gift of Jesus. Thank you,
9 Lord.

10 Bless us, bring us back often to the mountains,
11 Lord, they are great places to live and learn.

12 Now go with us as we descend the mountain and as we
13 share your goodness with a sinful world. Amen.

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