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**2-Narrative 05 – The Shema and The 10 Commandments
Deuteronomy 5:1-21; 6:4-9, Mark 12:28-31**

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“Wilderness Wanderings and Crucial Crossings”

It had been a long hard journey but at last they were there.
God had brought them out of slavery in Egypt through the wilderness and there it lay right before them –
the land to which God had led them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the promised land.
The only problem was that it was already occupied by other people.
God said, “That’s all right. Go ahead and conquer them. I will give you the victory.”
“Maybe we should send some spies in first”, they thought,
“to check it out, get the lay of the land, see what we’re up against.” And they did.
Sure enough, it was an amazing land.
The only trouble was that the people living there were like giants and the Israelites were too scared to fight.
At that God got angry and said,
“Fine! Because of your lack of trust and your disobedience you will not be allowed to enter this land!”
More afraid of God than of the giants, the people repented and agreed to fight, but God said,
“Sorry. It’s too late. I’ve already made up my mind.
If you fight now I will not be with you and you will be defeated.”
They went ahead and fought and were defeated just as God had said.
And they were driven back into the wilderness to wander for 40 years.

And now it is a new generation who stands outside the promised land, waiting to go in, and before they do,
Moses reminds them of God’s early advice, those rules for living as free people, those 10 commandments.

I think all of us have spent time wandering in the wilderness.
Sometimes it’s just part of the journey God has planned for us,
just like the Israelites’ journey from Egypt to the promised land.
Sometimes we end up in the wilderness because we haven’t done what God has asked us to do.
And sometimes we have no idea why we’re stuck where we are – and aren’t even sure whether it’s our fault or not.
So what do we do when we’re in the wilderness and longing for the promised land?
What do we do as we wait?
What do we do to get from one day to the next?

Here’s the image I suggest we keep in mind.
When you cross a street, what are you supposed to do?
Look left, look right, look left again, and then move forward.

The first thing we learn from this story
is to “look left”, that is, remember your past, where you’ve come from, the times that you’ve been through.
Unless we are very young, chances are it’s not our first time in the wilderness,
which means we’ve been brought through the Red Sea before.
Like the Israelites, we tend to have short memories, though.
God had caused 10 miraculous plagues to fall on the Egyptians.
God had convinced Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go.
When they had found themselves caught between the Red Sea and the pursuing Egyptian soldiers,
God had parted the waters so they could cross on dry land.
Then when the soldiers followed, God caused the waters to fall down on them and drown them.
That was a pretty remarkable list of things God had done to save them.
And yet when it came time to take over the promised land, it seems they had forgotten.
And so God reminds them,
“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

When we are lost and afraid in the wilderness, we, too, can “look left”, think back to the past and remember how God has brought us through before.

Say we lose our job and are worried about how we’re going to pay the bills.

It’s helpful to think back to another time when finances were tight and remember how things got better then.

Or say the love of our life has just left us

and we’re feeling devastated, completely alone, and without any hope for the future.

Maybe we can look back to another time in our life when we experienced the breakup of a relationship and remember that somehow God brought us through it.

Or say we’ve encountered a new health challenge, gotten a new and scary diagnosis, and we’re terrified of what lays ahead.

It can be helpful to remember the last time we had a health challenge and to recall how God got us through that one.

So the first thing to do when we’re lost and alone in the wilderness is to “look left”, to remember – to think back on where we’ve been and what we’ve come through, and how God has helped us before.

The second thing we can do is to “look right”, that is, focus on the future.

When God brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt

it was not so God could leave them to perish in the wilderness,

but so that God could take them to the promised land where they could live in freedom.

Whatever God brings us THROUGH God does in order to bring us TO something new.

God has put you on earth for a purpose –

not a purpose in the sense that God has written the script and gives it to you to follow,

but a purpose in the sense that God has given you particular gifts and experiences

that can be used not only in ways that will further God’s kingdom work in this world but in ways that will bring you incredible fulfillment and joy as well.

The point of your life is not to wander aimlessly around and around the wilderness

but to find that goal, that sense of purpose, that overwhelming desire

that burns in your heart and gets you so excited

that you can’t wait to jump out of bed each morning and get to work!

No matter what we are feeling about where we are in the present moment,

we can’t stay there going round and round in circles,

chased by our fears and failures, our doubts and despair, our sins and sorrows.

We need to stop, and “look left” to remember the past and where we’ve been

and how God has managed to bring us from there to here.

And we need to “look right” to focus on the future and why God has brought us this far

and what God wants for us and promises to give us.

And because the future is where the fear lies,

it’s helpful after we’ve “looked left” at the past and “looked right” at the future

to “look left” at the past once again – just to remind ourselves what God has already done.

And once we've "looked left, then right, then left again", it's time to move forward.
After we have remembered the past and focused on the future and reminded ourselves of the past yet again,
it's time to let go of both past and future and live and act in the present.
And by that I don't mean to stay in that wilderness place of negative emotions
swirling with past pain and future fear
because there are no negative emotions in the present moment, in the now.
Negative emotions like sin and guilt and feelings of failure come from too much focus on the past;
negative emotions like fear and doubt and anxiety come from too much focus on the future.

When we give over our minds to thoughts of what has already happened or fears of what might happen
we are unable to act in faith.

If your husband has left you and you feel so alone you want to die,
those feelings stem from what has already happened in the past – he's left you –
& what you are afraid will happen in the future – you will always be alone & will never be happy again.

The past cannot be changed, but the future is not yet written.

There isn't just one possible future, or two possible futures, but an infinite number of future possibilities.

But you can't act in the future any more than you can act in the past.

The only place and time in which you can act is in the here-and-now.

And that here-and-now is the place where we meet God,
the place we encounter the great I AM,
the place in which God can act in our lives to make all things new.

When we find ourselves wandering in the wilderness, lost and alone,
it's helpful to remember how God has brought us to where we are
and to remind ourselves that there's a place to which God is calling us.

We need to stop, "look left", "look right", and "look left again".

And then we need to narrow our focus down

from this day to this hour to this minute to this second to this moment

and know that it is in the here-and-now

that God waits for us to surrender our hearts and minds and spirits and bodies — our whole selves —
to the one who made us, the one who loved us & the one who promises to hold us & keep us forever.

When we do that, when we put ourselves in God's hands, then God can turn us upside down,
emptying out all the fears and failures, doubts and despair, sin and sorrows

and every other piece of garbage that has weighed us down,

and then God can turn us right side up again

and fill us with all of those things we will need for the journey —
faith and hope and grace and love and peace and joy.

When you are lost in the wilderness, Stop.

"Look left". Remember what God has done for you.

"Look right". Remember what God has promised you.

"Look left again" and Remember what God has already done.

Then forget everything past and everything future and just be present in the moment – right here, right now,

with open heart and open mind and open spirit and open body

and ask God to give you exactly what you need.

Remember the past. Remember the promise. Remember the past. And move forward.

Look left, look right, look left again.

Then reach up and take your heavenly Parent's hand and move forward together.

Love the Lord with all your heart and all your mind and all your soul and all your body.

Love God. And then let God love you. **Amen**