

THE BIBLICAL WILD

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WEEK VIII: Numbers 4-20 / Psalms 41-46

From Psalm 41: Happy are those who consider the poor. The Lord delivers them in the day of trouble. The Lord protects them and keeps them alive. They are called happy in the land. You do not give them up to the will of their enemies. The Lord sustains them on their sick bed. In their illness you heal all of their infirmities. AMEN.

I'm Todd Ousley, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Michigan and this is The Biblical Wild: Pioneers in the Christian Wilderness. We turn our attention this week to the Book of Numbers, a book of the Bible that gets little attention in critical studies and Bible Studies in local congregations and little mention in our lectionary text. Perhaps its because there are no new themes that are introduced in the Book of Numbers. It concerns itself with the wandering in the wilderness and anticipation of movement into the promised land and those are well covered in other places. But perhaps there is something interesting for us to consider in this book that is revealed to us in the title: Numbers. For in chapters 1 and 26, we see lists of people, genealogies of those both in chapter one, the old generation, and in chapter 26, the new generation.

This distinction between the old generation and the new generation is brought to us in a contrast between those who have been disobedient in the wandering in the wilderness and have experienced YAHWEH's wrath over them and hardship along the way. Contrasted with those who remained faithful and are able to see and more clearly anticipate the promises that God has made to them.

When we move to the 24th verse of the 14th chapter, we see how the future is going to unfold.

“But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit and has followed me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land for which he wept and his decedents shall posses it.”

So we hear that moving into the land and the possession of the new generation of this land comes because there is a new and different spirit exemplified in the person of Caleb.

For those of us who find ourselves on that border between the old and the new generation, between an old way of being Church and new way of being Church, this book is particularly instructive to us. I'm drawn to the notion that Caleb has a new and different spirit and I wonder what it is going to take for us in the Church to discover that new and different spirit and have the courage to embrace it as we cross from one

generation to another, from one place to another, from one current reality to a new possibility for a future as God's Children.

This week as you consider Holy Scripture, I invite you to ponder the question: What is the new spirit that you must have in order to see new possibilities for the future?

May God bless you and I will see you next week.