

West Branch Community of Christ

Participant Companion Guide – Lectionary Lessons Pilot

March 15, 2015

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Theme: CONFESS OUR IMPATIENCE

Numbers 21:4–9 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

4From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. 5The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food." 6Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. 7The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. 8And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live." 9So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

Central Ideas:

- ***A life of impatience, complaining, or discontentment causes us to disconnect from one another and God.***
- ***Confessing our impatience frees us. With this freedom we are open to receiving God's generous offer of forgiveness. And we are healed and made whole.***

Exploring the Scripture

First, we need to confess, we can be impatient. Our impatience usually results in bad decisions or missed opportunities for ministry. You and I are not the only impatient ones. The Israelites of Moses' time were impatient too.

This is the last in a series of stories about Moses and God's people journeying together. It is called the final "murmuring" story—one of the stories of complaint, discontent, and rebellion found in Exodus and Numbers composed by the ancient priests of Israel who were all too familiar with unrest.

The people following Moses were tired of the journey. They did not like wandering in the wilderness. They didn't like the food they found. They were uncomfortable and thirsty. And at times, they didn't like their leader, Moses. Not much was right in their world.

The story takes a turn that seems difficult to accept. Venomous snakes are sent to stop the complaining and rebellion. It's not that God seeks vengeance, it's about impatience, complaining, and whining disconnecting them from God.

God gets their attention and instructs Moses to make a serpent to focus their attention and remind them God desires to heal them and restore their faith and trust. Jesus refers to this story when he talks with the teacher Nicodemus about being lifted up (through crucifixion) like Moses raising the bronze serpent (John 3:14).

This scripture story in Numbers may seem difficult to grasp and understand. We might even think it has no connection to our ministry today. However, it may be more of a reflection of us than we care to admit or accept.

Sometimes our discussions about the color of new paint or the design of a building sound like Moses and his people—impatient and grumbling. Our resemblance to Moses' people can be humbling.

When we are disconnected from God, we are reminded by the touch of the Holy Spirit that God loves us. Moses' people needed a loud reminder before they could confess their faithlessness, sins, and impatience.

While we are not immune to disagreement and impatience, we have the advantage of scripture stories to give us clues about how to live and act as God's people. The trials and errors of Moses' people can help us understand the need for patience and faith in any era and setting. So, let us confess our impatience and turn toward a waiting God.