

## FOURTH WEEK OF LENT: “FIERY SERPENTS”

### OPENING PRAYER

*The leader prays out loud:*

Healing God, even when troubles seem to overwhelm us, you're present with us, promising wholeness and abundant life. When doubt and disaster lay us low, give us strength to raise our heads and perceive the vision of salvation you set before us. Amen.

### GATHERING TIME

*Each person responds to one of the following:*

- Snakes: cohabitants of a diverse creation, or terrifying slither-monsters? Please explain your views.
- What are your favorite coping methods in times of stress?
- If you were to point to one period in your life as “the good old days,” when would that be?

### BIBLICAL REFLECTION

*The leader reads the following:*

This passage is from the book of Numbers, which covers the forty-year wandering of the Israelites in the wilderness before they finally enter the promised land. The Israelites sometimes grow nostalgic for the life they had in Egypt, and find it difficult to trust God. In this passage, the Israelites complain, encounter poisonous serpents, and interpret their experience as divine punishment. When they ask Moses to intercede for them, God responds with a solution that gives them hope and a promise of survival.

*A member of the group reads the passage:*

“The 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.’ Then the LORD sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. The 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. And 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.’” (Numbers 21:5-8)

*The group discusses the following questions, picking and choosing the ones that work best for them:*

- Much of the book of Numbers is about a new nation learning to trust its God. What are some times that you/this community has had to depend on God? How has God responded?
- In verse 5, the Israelites complain, “There is no food...and we detest this miserable food.” What do you think is going on here? Why?
- The Israelites believe that the poisonous serpents begin plaguing them because they complained, but the text does not say this outright. As people of faith, how do we know whether or when God is behind things that happen in our lives?
- The Israelites sometimes remember their enslavement as the “good old days.” What are times that our community thinks of as our “good old days?” When does nostalgia help us? When does it hurt us?
- What spiritual practices (if any) have you committed to during this forty-day Lenten journey? How are they going so far? Where do you need God’s help to succeed at them?

### CLOSING PRAYER

*The leader prays aloud:*

Protecting God, you were faithful to the Israelites throughout forty years of wandering, even when they weren't faithful to you. Increase our trust in you day by day, so that we might see you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more dearly. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.