

King of Glory Lutheran Church  
February 20/21, 2021  
Year B: 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent: Mark 1:9-15  
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***Mark 1:9-15***

*<sup>9</sup> In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. <sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”*

*<sup>12</sup> And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. <sup>13</sup> He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.*

*<sup>14</sup> Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God <sup>15</sup> and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”*

In this winter season I know it feels like time stands still, especially during these cold days we are experiencing. And yet, in the church year we are in a new season.

This is the first weekend in Lent, a season we just began a few days ago on Ash Wednesday. A season that lasts five weeks and will take us to Holy Week and Easter.

Our gospel reading for this first weekend in Lent comes from the first chapter of Mark. In just a few short verses a lot happens in Jesus’ life. He experiences a new season of his life and ministry.

First, Jesus is baptized by John in the Jordan River. He saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

But Jesus doesn’t get a lot of time to enjoy the moment. The gospel writer tells us, “the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.” The Spirit that came down from the heavens like a gentle dove for Jesus’ baptism now drives him out into the wilderness.

Jesus was there in the wilderness for forty days tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

We don't know exactly what Jesus was thinking during those forty days but we can try to imagine what his time in the wilderness was like.

What was it like to hang out with wild beasts and angels and be tempted by Satan? Were there moments when Jesus wondered where God was? Did he remember God's voice calling him "beloved" in his baptism?

Although it leaves out a lot of details, this brief sentence in the gospel of Mark tells us that Jesus knew and had experience in the wilderness, in a wild place. There were wild animals around, which sounds scary to me.

And he was tempted by Satan, which is even more intense than the animals. Not what I would consider a relaxing time out in nature. I wonder if Jesus found himself lonely, overwhelmed or exhausted by it all.

And then the angels waited on him. I hope Jesus found company and comfort from them.

What do you imagine when you think of the wilderness? Take a moment, close your eyes and see what comes to mind....

The wilderness might be a place perhaps in the mountains or forest or desert that is uninhabited. Maybe the wilderness you picture is a place that is wild and dangerous, or peaceful and quiet, or isolated and filled with unknowns.

Living in Colorado I'm sure many of you have wilderness stories you could tell.

So we know about the wilderness in a physical and geographical sense but we know other kinds of wilderness as well.

We know the kind of wilderness that we can be thrown into, not by choice, but by life. Not a place but an experience or a feeling. The kind of wilderness where we feel alone, overwhelmed, or exhausted.

Maybe you've been thrown into that kind of wilderness because of a broken relationship, an illness, an addiction, a lost job, a move, or the death of a loved one.

We have all had experiences in life that have driven us into a wilderness place. And in this past year we have had a collective experience in the wilderness.

A year ago we were all driven into the new experience of living with a contagious virus, unknown and uncontrolled. We had to learn new ways to live. New ways to connect, work, learn, worship, recreate and survive. All of us have found ourselves alone, overwhelmed and exhausted by this experience from time to time.

Well no matter what kind of wilderness you find yourself in, one shared by our whole community or one we walk alone in, we all experience wilderness times in life. And the very nature of the wilderness means that we can become disoriented and unsure of how to find our way out. In those wilderness places we often feel so lost that we struggle to hear or see or know God, and we wonder if we are alone in a place where even God won't find us.

Well it's no coincidence that we are taking some time to think about wilderness experiences today, on this first weekend in Lent.

Lent is a time, a season, when Christians reflect on our journey of faith. It is a kind of wilderness experience where we carve out time and space as a community and as individuals for self-examination and repentance.

In the wilderness of these forty days we first need to stop, look around and realize that we are in need of God's presence and love. That we might need to change directions. That's what repentance is.

The wilderness has the power to change our journey. Whether it is a quiet wilderness or a dangerous wilderness or a confusing wilderness – wilderness places show us that we need help, guidance and direction. In the wilderness we long to hear God's voice and feel God's presence and be reminded of God's promises to us. And when we are lonely or lost God has the power to lead us out of the wilderness places we find ourselves in.

Whether you find yourself voluntarily journeying through the wilderness of this Lenten season or are in a wilderness of another kind, know Jesus' promise today that you are not alone. Jesus knows what it is to be in the wilderness and he knows what it is to feel alone, overwhelmed and exhausted. And he has shown us by his life, death and resurrection that he is with us no matter what. Nothing can separate us from his love.

That is the promise that is with us in the wilderness. But that's not all Jesus shows us today.

Jesus didn't stay in the wilderness. He kept on moving. He went to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Just as Jesus is with us in the wilderness, he will also help us find our way out.

This year as we journey through Lent and our own wilderness time we have been given some tools to help us find our way. Maybe even change directions and take a new path.

During these forty days of Lent Christians focus on several practices to help us see where we are today and where Jesus is calling us in the days ahead. We are invited to practice fasting, give to those in need and spend time in prayer.

This year these practices might just be special gifts for us. Considering that we are in a unique kind of wilderness as a world, community and congregation we need to make this Lent unique as well.

In this season Jesus will show us a way through the wilderness and this Lenten season in new ways. So what will your path look like? How will you hear the good news Jesus brings of hope, love and new life? What will repentance look like for you as you are invited to stop and change direction.

As you live out the Lenten practices of prayer, fasting and giving God will put a new path before you.

Pray in a new way this season. Add a new prayer practice to your day. Practice listening and breathing in the Holy Spirit for a couple minutes each day. Ask for guidance this season. Fast from something you can offer to God. If there is one worry that consumes you share that with God when it comes to mind. Fast from worry, even if it is only for a few minutes each day. And give generously. Set aside a bit of money or food each day that you can then share with those in need.

Jesus is with us in the wilderness this season. And he will be with us as we journey forward, calling us to share in the good news he brings. Blessings to you on your Lenten journey.

Amen.