

Year B 1 Lent
Genesis 9:8-17
Psalm 25:1-10
1 Peter 3:18-22
Mark 1:9-15

Pastor Lindsey Jorgensen-Skakum
February 18, 2018
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – Amen.

This morning we hear that Jesus was driven out into the wilderness following his baptism in the Jordan. And just in case you missed it, the gospel makes it abundantly clear that he wasn't invited, or even politely asked to go out into the elements following that moment - he was legitimately thrown out into the wilderness by the Spirit of God.

Let that sink in for a minute...

Jesus was thrown out into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit.

He wasn't driven out by an angry mob, or even run off by the religious elite. He was driven out by the same Spirit who had just showered him with blessings from above. The same Spirit who had helped proclaim one of the biggest revelations of Jesus ministry and our faith just moments before – that he was in fact the son of God.

According to our Gospel reading this morning, Jesus baptism and even his proclaimed sonship doesn't spare him from the trials and tribulations he would come to face over the next 40 days. A time period Saint Mark leaves entirely up to our imagination to fill in the blanks.

And it's not too hard for us to do with the details he's left behind: Satan brooding in the wilderness, beasts and angles vying for Christ's attention, and the isolating expanse of earth stretching out endlessly before him. This is certainly not a time any one of us would opt to join in for with Christ.

Which leaves me to wonder why Christ was sent out into the wilderness at all? Didn't God just proclaim that Jesus was his beloved son – why then does the Spirit drive him out into the wilderness? And what, if anything, does this period of struggle and temptation mean for his ministry among us here?

Questions like these are not unlike the questions we come to hold as we find ourselves in the midst of the wilderness of our lives. Whether it is our own time of trial, or that of our family and friends, we simply want to know why this is happening at all?

And that's exactly where the tension of this gospel comes in.

We ask these questions too because we often feel like we have been sent off into the wilderness like Jesus was. Many of us don't go looking for periods of trial, temptation,

and struggle because we have lived long enough to know that these times will simply happen whether we want them to or not. And, even if the challenges before us are of our own making – we rarely want such hardship to truly linger in our lives at all.

And it would seem that as followers of Christ we have no less chance of facing a crisis of faith, then the person next to us in the grocery store line – no matter how often we read our bibles, attend church, or help others in our free time – we simply aren't going to be given a "get out of jail free" card as a reward for our time and devotion. As the gospel of Matthew says, the rain falls on the just and the unjust – clearly there is no way to avoiding the wilderness of our lives.

So what are we supposed to do as Christians when we come to face times such as these?

While there are many ways to deal with our troubling times, I want to share three possibilities with you this morning as a way to think about our response as people of faith.

First, we can reach out to reconnect with God.

During times of hardship and pain, one of the things I hear most often from people is the need to hear words of God's promise for their lives again. Words like those found in our first reading today, where God promises to never forsake this world again – setting a bow in the sky to serve as a reminder of the covenant with us to hold and keep all of creation once and for all. In our second lesson we also hear similar words of promise from Saint Peter telling us there is no sin, sadness, or pain that can keep Christ from journeying with us to find hope in this life again.

These are promises that we have heard time and time again – yet we so easily forget them when we are called out into the wilderness of our lives. Yet this is why we return to these words during our time of need. To be reminded that like Christ – we too are God's beloved, and that no test of trial will ever take that will ever separate us from God's saving grace.

Secondly, in times of need we come to call on the support of our families and our community of faith.

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God has richly blessed all of us here in this place with a family of God who care, look after, and check in on one another throughout our lives of faith together. And this is not something we do out of a sense of duty – it is an expression of the love and grace we have each received here in this place.

It is part of the gifts we each bring to the body of Christ here at Holy Spirit, and I have witnessed this community helping one another through many times of need. I'm sure each of you could likely share a story or two of what this church family has helped or supported you through – and maybe sometime we should open up a space for those stories to be heard in this place, but for now let me share some of the ways I have witnessed this taking place.

Many of us here are gifted in prayerful conversations – journeying alongside those in need of extra support during a time of hardship. While others are gifted in tangible acts of care through the offering rides, childcare, or preparing funeral luncheons. And there are others who work behind the scenes supporting our parish pantry, or sponsor opportunities for youth grow in their faith.

God has gifted us with each other as a family of faith to support and uphold one another in both times of trial and celebration. If you find your self in the midst of the wilderness or are simply having a bad day – your church family is here to uplift and sustain you until you're on your feet again.

Lastly, thinking of our own times in the wilderness through the lens of this gospel, we can look for ways that the Spirit of God might make use of us even during our most difficult times.

In saying this - I want to be absolutely clear that I am not suggesting that God causes us misery or suffering to teach us something, punish us, or put us in our place. Far from it - I don't believe that God even wants us to suffer, let alone causes us to. But I do wonder if we can imagine that perhaps God is at work both for us and through us during our times of hardship and despair?

And I wonder if we can look at the struggles around us in light of this Gospel story and ask, "Even though I did not wish for this, how might God be at work through this difficult period? How might God use me to help someone else?"

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These kinds of questions aren't meant so much to redeem struggle and suffering – as if that's our job! But rather to remind us of God's presence during those wilderness times that leave us feeling stretched beyond our abilities. Because, the same Spirit of God that descended upon Jesus at his Baptism and drove Jesus out into the wilderness, also accompanied him during that time of trial and brought him back again into the fullness of his ministry with God.

So maybe this text today is calling us to look at our struggles, hear the promise of God's presence, and then look for God at work in and through them for the sake of this world God loves so much. God is, after all, in the business of taking that which seems only to cause death and somehow wring from it resurrection life. And that's not a bad thing to remember at the beginning of Lent.

Jesus time in the wilderness invites us to more faithfully view our own difficult experiences not as a test from a distant and punishing God - but simply as a part of our life and walk of faith that Christ and the Holy Spirit continue to accompany us on.

So hear the good news of this gospel today that you are truly never alone.

You are a valued and beloved member of the family of God.

No matter your place, your age, or your station in this life, your trials and temptations are not a reflection of Christ's love for you as a child of God. They are simply a part of this broken and beautiful life.

And that no matter where this life's road will twist and turn - Christ, the holy spirit, and this community of faith will continue to walk alongside you until you are safely home.

And may this be so among us – Amen.