

Into the Wilderness...

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In last week's Gospel, God clearly told the disciples who Jesus was. God says "This is my son the beloved, listen to him. This week's lesson jumps back 9 chapters to the time that God tells Jesus who Jesus is. "You are my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased. We don't know for sure how much Jesus knew before then, if he knew that he was the ONE, but this makes it definite, and marks the beginning of Jesus short three-year earthly ministry.

The Spirit of God delivers the news and then immediately drives Jesus into the wilderness for 40 days of reflection and temptation. Sounds a little like Lent.

Forty, as you know, is a significant number in scripture. Noah, Moses, Ezekiel, Nineveh.. Elijah fasted 40 days before he received God's revelation and was ministered to by an angel, as Jesus will be.}

Although Mark doesn't talk about it in as much detail as the Gospel according to Matthew, we know that Satan will tempt Jesus repeatedly during this time, as we are tempted in our lives. Jesus is surrounded by wild beasts. Like Jesus, we may have a figurative wilderness where things are difficult even beastly, perhaps. The wilderness can be a real place or a lonely place in our hearts, a place we may be lonely even when we are not alone.

Jesus was alone in the quiet of the wilderness, and John Martens has observed:

"We tend not to like too much silence because we have to face ourselves. In the desert Jesus was led by the spirit into a solitary lonely place. What did he meet there? What do we meet in the watches of the night. At times we may be at peace, contented at deep rest in our stillness. At other times, while the outer voices have gone the inner voices, the voices from within the soul, of doubt, insecurity, shame, failure and weakness all come bubbling to the surface. We encounter our fears, anger, loves and memories of things that might have been, our secret dreams. In the desert, alone, Jesus is wrestling with Himself, facing down his own fears and demons."

Jesus was among the wild beasts. What, or who, are the wild beasts in our lives?

We know Jesus was tempted. We know we are tempted---by things we shouldn't eat, or do, by negative attitudes and unkind thoughts about people with whom we disagree.

In the desert alone Jesus is wrestling with himself, facing down his own demons and temptations.

Our Gospel talks about Jesus' Baptism. Like Jesus, our Baptism is a case of identifying who we are, whose we are and then to strive to be obedient. Unlike Jesus, our ability to resist temptation is flawed, even with the gift and promises of our Baptism.

At our Baptism we promise to "persevere in resisting evil, and whenever we fall into sin, repent and return the Lord, with God's help". I like that we had a Baptism last Sunday; it's a

good lead in to Lent with the reminder of what we are to do, with God's help, facing difficult situations or temptations in our lives. And in the prayers for the candidates for Baptism we ask that they be delivered from the way of sin and death, that their hearts be open to God's Grace and truth, be filled with God's holy and life-giving spirit, sent into the world in witness to God's love and brought to the fullness of God's peace and glory.

Perhaps, that is our prayer for ourselves in this Lent, as we go voluntarily into the Wilderness for prayer and fasting, repentance and resisting temptation.

On Ash Wednesday we were invited to "make a right beginning of repentance". A beginning, a start. Living into our Baptismal Covenant is a lifelong endeavor. But we will make a start, with God's help.

And remember, the angels cared for Jesus. We are cared for by "angels". By the Holy Spirit and those who are angels in our lives. As we identify the temptations, the beasts in our own wilderness, let us also identify the angels who will tend to us there, and see how we can be angels for each other.

And remember, after the 40 days, Jesus came out of the wilderness proclaiming, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near---believe in the good news". May we come to Easter believing ever more fully in the Good News.

Let us pray:

God of Grace, during this Lenten Season, help us to stop and listen, then go and proclaim that God has come near, to stand by us in our struggle and offer us strength to help others

Help us to fast and feed,

Pray and act,

Live and love,

For therein lies the Good News!

Amen