

Lenten Journeys

Genesis 9:8-17 and Mark 1:9-15

In David Wolpe's book, Teaching Your Children about God, he tells this story:

A boy and his father were walking along a road when they came across a very large stone . The boy said to his father, "Do you think if I use all my strength I can move this rock?" His father answered, "If you use all your strength I am sure you can do it." The boy began to push the rock. Exerting himself as much as he could, he pushed and pushed. The rock did not move.

Discouraged, the boy said to his father, "You were wrong! I can't do it!" The father placed his arms around the boy's shoulders and said, "No son, you didn't use all of your strength. You didn't ask me for help."

The consciousness of the presence of God - a simple reliance on the Spirit of the Universe - a belief that God is everything or he is nothing — — do we strive for these attitudes? Or are we like the boy who thinks that self-reliance and self-will are all we have?

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The people of the Old Testament tried hard, follow a myriad of rules They prayed several times a day They made sacrifices, and they waited for someone to save them, someone to heal them, someone to lead them. The people were waiting. They had not had a prophet in 300 years. The Kingdom of God was beyond their grasp.

And then a man walked from Galilee to be baptized by John. The Testament of Mark, which we read today, has a single focus; through Jesus we can repent and know the Gospel. Mark tells us The Kingdom of God is at hand right where we are; it lives within us. The time of waiting is over. Our Savior has set us free.

The same Spirit that came upon Jesus at his baptism lead him to the wilderness to face his temptations. Temptations are not sent to make us fail, they are sent to make us, with God's help overcomers. They are sent to move us into the Kingdom of God. We may feel lost in the wilderness, but we will find our true selves, just as Jesus did.

Wilderness experiences are extraordinary times. Something wonderful will always come from them. The Hebrew slaves

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traveled in the wilderness for 40 years and found the Promised Land. Elijah fled to the wilderness to hide from God, but heard his Still Small Voice. Noah rode out 40 days and 40 nights on a boat alone in a water wilderness and finds God's promise in a rainbow in the sky. John the Baptist finds his voice and his mission in the wilderness. And Jesus facing temptation and emerging from the wilderness finds his voice and begins his ministry.

Michael Houdmann states; "Jesus' experience teaches us some important facts: 1) it is not a sin to be tempted; 2) it is God's will that times of testing come our way and 3) we are never without God's grace.

In the wilderness, Jesus had to choose how he was going to respond to the tempter. Was he going to use his powers for his own self-satisfaction, aggrandizement and wealth or was he going to practice humility, sacrifice and integrity?

Bible scholars tell us that Mark's focus is on Jesus and the Kingdom of God. Mark is not as concerned with details of events as he is their outcomes. So, in today's Gospel we have little detail about the temptations Jesus faced in the wilderness. Matthew, in
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4:1-11 tells us of three temptations which Jesus rebukes and gives us these words, “Man does not live by bread alone”, “You shall not tempt your God”, and “You shall worship the Lord your God and only him will you serve”.

Jesus comes out of his wilderness ready. He comes out of the wilderness to do the will of God. He comes out of the wilderness the conqueror sin. His life is no longer his own, but God's. He will continue to be God's servant the rest of his days on earth and into eternity. And he calls us to be His disciples. To listen for the word of God to speak to us. To ask for direction and guidance of how to carry that out in our daily lives.

Jesus was not left to fight his battles on his own and neither are we. The Good News that Jesus brings is victory over our warring selves. He brings us the Good News of Truth, of Hope for the hopeless heart. Of Peace and Promise. Of Immortality and Salvation. We are always on the way to life, not death. The Good News is that God strengthens us to meet any challenge. The challenge is to live knowing that God is sufficient. God never abandons us.

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William Barclay puts it this way: “To believe in the Good News is simply to take God at his word; to believe that God is the kind of God Jesus told us about. To believe that God so loves us and this world that he will make any sacrifice to bring us back to himself.”

Through our wilderness experiences this Lenten Season, helps us to stay the path when we feel lost. Let us hear your voice say to us, “If you use all your strength I am sure you can do it. Ask me for help and I will never fail you”. Then we will find our way home, home to Easter and home to God.

Let's be in prayer.

Guide us Lord, this Lenten season, to strive to serve others and to be good stewards. Help us walk humbly knowing that our lives are not ours alone That our lives belong to God. Make each thought, each action, each attitude align with yours. If we fall short of the mark, as we surely will, help us to acknowledge our wrong and ask with Your help to do better, to be better, to imitate Christ. Help us will to do the will of God.

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ.

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As an addendum I ran across this quote by Jennifer Worth, the author of Call the Midwife books.

“Sometimes prayer is not a still point. The day doesn’t offer up the peace we imagine. But in the darkness seeds awake and green shoots unfurl toward the light. Fate may shake us, but our roots run deep — and we have love to water them — so, we bloom”.

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