

The Reverend Renee L. Fenner
St. Barnabas Episcopal Church
1st Sunday in Lent/Year B
February 18, 2018
Text: Mark 1:9-15

This is the first Sunday in Lent and our Gospel passage is familiar to us.

Mark plants us at the beginning of his gospel and tells us that the time had come for Jesus to put aside the familiar life he knew growing up in Nazareth; a town considered “a third-class village in second-class Galilee.”

He made his way as others did to the Jordan River where his cousin, John, was baptizing. John never consider himself a prophet but a messenger who urged people to turn their lives back to God and make ready for the One who was coming and in John’s words, was “more powerful” than himself. Everyone, ordinary folks to religious leaders, flocked to hear John’s message of repentance and to be baptized by him. John’s baptism wasn’t the usual ritual cleansing but a baptism for the forgiveness of sins, a baptism that ushered in a new way of life.

Jesus took off his sandals and stood in line waiting his turn. And when his turn came, he went down into the water. And when he came up, the heavens tore apart and the Spirit of God descended on and into his being. And he heard a voice that announces him as God’s Son, *the Beloved*. God’s Chosen One.

He doesn’t take time to towel off or sit and soak up the sun’s rays allowing them to dry him or his clothes. He doesn’t take time to catch up on family matters or to confer with John about what he had just experienced or even introduce himself to some of the whispering crowd. Instead, Jesus is immediately driven out into the desert. As he walked, over and over he remembers the words he heard spoken so clearly to him, “*You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased,*” words that compel him to go deeper and deeper into the wilderness where no one would follow. It is dry. It is hot and barren. There were wild beasts. There was Satan.

But there too, were the angels who ministered to him and most importantly, God was with him. And for forty days he stayed. Listening, praying, conversing with himself and with the One whose voice he heard at his baptism. Putting at bay, the voice of the tempter. And it came to him who he was and what he was meant

to be. The voice had spoken truth. He was no longer Jesus bar Joseph, the son of Joseph the carpenter. He wasn't to make a living building furniture but he was to build up the kingdom of God. He was to be about the work of God and proclaim the Good News.

And so on Ash Wednesday we were marked with the ultimate sign of love-the cross-beginning our time in the desert. A time that we too are to set aside all distractions. A time in the wilderness to hear for ourselves that we too are beloved, that we too are to contemplate our own relationships with God and what that means for our lives.

As a church we've made the outward adjustments. We won't put out flowers of any kind in our worship space and we've taken away our banner and flag to remind us of the barrenness of the desert. Vestments and paraments are the color purple to remind us that it is the season of fasting and penance. There are no bells so we'll have to pay attention to beginnings and movement. We've switched to Rite I which means we need to be aware that we are deliberately speaking different words and saying prayers we don't normally use. A certain word of praise is not said at all until the Sunday of Resurrection. And we will live these forty days of simplicity with each other and with God.

If we are to be true to this time in the wilderness there will be things we need to do individually. The wilderness calls us to go *there*, to live differently though we would rather not change our habits, our routines and agendas at all. People have grown accustomed to the din of noise, the busyness, and complacency. And all the other things that distract us from God. Still, like Jesus, we find ourselves compelled by the Spirit to go to places we'd rather not. "But the wilderness is where we as individuals and as community must go because out of the wild comes new life.*

On Ash Wednesday we were invited to set these forty days apart. The invitation remains the same. In the name of the Church:

I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word.

-BCP page 265

I pray that each of us take time to do *these* things at the very least. Take time to pray, to fast, to open your Bibles and read and reflect on God's holy Word.

Take part in our Lenten offerings. Find your own disciplines if you can. If you want to give up chocolate fine. If you want to take on volunteer hours at a food pantry fine. But *be still*, if only for a few minutes each day, and hear God's voice speaking to you. A voice that reminds you that you are loved. You are chosen.

The voice that came from the heavens at Jesus' baptism affirmed his calling and his identity. The desert proved to Jesus that God was with him and meant it with these words, "*You are my Son, the Beloved (my Chosen One); with you I am well pleased.*" From the desert and out into the world Jesus walked-ready to face those who would question his authority and oppose him and plot to kill him. Ready to silence demons. Ready to heal the broken and welcome the least. Ready to proclaim the Good News and announce the kingdom of God that has come near.

God has also claimed us and invites us into the wilderness where we will face ourselves and our demons and the beasts of the world. But we will not be left alone because we will have encountered the holy. We really do need to go there-where new life and new identities can be found.

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

*taken from *Wilderness*, a sermon by The Rev. Deon Johnson for 'Sermons That Work', Lent 1, Year B, 2018