

Devotions for the Week of March 10, 2019

LARGE-PRINT

1st Week of Lent

North East United Methodist Church

By Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

Sunday, March 10, 2019

Read Mark 1: 9-15.

Mark shares with us the moment Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River and His wrestling with Satan in the wilderness, as well as the beginning of His ministry in Galilee proclaiming the “*Good News.*”

I was reminded of a song Marty Robbins sings, “*On the wings of a snow-white dove, He sends His pure sweet love, A sign from above, On the wings of a dove.*” Robbins sings of Noah and the dove, whose return signaled the receding waters.

I thought about those lyrics and Jesus’ baptism found in Mark’s Gospel, and I was struck by the contrast. At Jesus’ baptism, the “snow-white” dove does surround Jesus with God’s love. Jesus hears the words, “*You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.*” But this dove, the Holy Spirit, brings much more than the love and peace Robbins sings about. This dove brings “*upheaval*” and “*reorganization,*” writes Rodney J. Hunter.

Stanley P. Saunders writes, “*Jesus’ baptism marks for him the end of the old world and the beginning of a new one, as is made clear as soon as he arises from the Jordan and sees the heavens themselves being torn-apart. The image is both violent and hope-filled. The only other place Mark uses this word for ripping and tearing is in the description of the events*

that take place at the moment Jesus dies on the cross, when the veil of the temple is torn in two, from top to bottom. In both cases, God is doing the ripping.”

Following Jesus’ baptism, we read that the Holy Spirit, “*immediately drove*” Jesus into the wilderness where He was tested and tempted by Satan.

It was only after this “ripping” and “upheaval,” Jesus being driven into the wilderness and tempted, that Jesus’ ministry began, miracles took place, and it was recognized that “*the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near.*”

It is no different with us as God sends His Holy Spirit into our hearts and immediately begins an “*upheaval*” and “*reorganization.*” God begins a transformation. As Paul wrote, “*the old life is gone; a new life has begun.*” Suddenly behaviors and thoughts we have practiced are seen in a different light, priorities are realigned with God’s Word, practices are changed, forgiveness is given and sought out. We begin to look at everything different, through the eyes of God. Our lives are truly “*reorganized*” as God takes us through a metamorphosis.

For us, this is not a forty-day wilderness experience as in the life of Jesus, one who was without sin, but for us it is a life-long process, involving our surrendering to God and wrestling for God’s meaning afresh every day. We must allow God to “rip” away what we know or think we know. We must allow God to “tear apart” our hearts and remold our hearts to be more in line with Him. We must allow God to transform us and make us new. At times this can be unpleasant.

Pray and ask God to be gentle, to “tear open” your life, that you might become more like His Son, and begin your

ministry to the world with the strength of His Holy Spirit. Pray that God would send His love down on the “*wings of a dove,*” but remember as Max Lucado writes, “*God loves you just the way you are, but refuses to leave you that way.*” His Spirit will surround you with love but will also begin a holy, yet sometimes painful, process of self-examination & transformation.

Monday, March 11, 2019

Read Mark 1: 9-15.

When Jesus returns from the wilderness, His ministry begins. Jesus proclaims the “*good news of God,*” and shouts, “*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe the good news.*”

It was in the wilderness that our salvation began. Stanley P. Saunders writes, “*...the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness... Jesus is retracing the steps of Israel’s history in order to rewrite her story. Whereas Israel in the wilderness stumbled and wandered for forty years in sin, rebellion, and distrust, longing again for the chains of slavery, Jesus withstands Satan’s tests in the wilderness for forty days. By this means, Jesus is retracing Israel’s steps, rewriting her story, and recasting the destiny of all of God’s people. Jesus’ first declaration of the gospel, after the temptation in the wilderness, says as much: he announces that the time has been made full, and God’s rule has come near.*”

As Dick France writes, Jesus, who has just been declared to be the Son of God, “*...faces up to the implications of that role in the wilderness. The world is a battlefield between God and Satan, good and evil, and Jesus’ mission will take Him into the heart of that battle. He will again and again confront the*

spiritual forces of evil...which will in the end lead him to the final conflict of the cross.”

When Jesus returns from the wilderness, He has faced evil, He is ready for the battle, He is resolute in fulfilling His mission accepting His Sonship. Like Paul writes, *“The old life is gone; a new life has begun.”*

It is the same with us. We must face the wilderness. We must face the temptation of the world that has coaxed us in, pulled us away from God’s direction for our lives. We must face the evil within us, the sin that separates us from God and prevents us from fulfilling our mission as *“ambassadors of Christ.”* And once we have faced these temptations, recognized what is evil, stood against that which is not of God, and turned resolutely toward our mission and our Savior, our mission also begins. *“The time has been made full.” “The old life is gone; a new life has begun.”* Our ministry of proclaiming the *“good news”* in word and action is thrust upon us and we accept our calling to *“go and make disciples,”* allowing the Spirit to guide and empower us in our mission.

Each wilderness experience we encounter strengthens us for the major trials that lay ahead, deepening our intimacy and relationship with Christ, and enabling us to be more resolute in fulfilling our God-given mission.

Pray that God will help you understand when you are in a wilderness experience and will open your eyes to what God is helping you learn and understand, how God is strengthening you for the journey. Allow your wilderness experiences to open up doors for self-examination, helping you look in the mirror and recognize those areas that are holding you back from God and from fulfilling your mission. And then go forth from those

experiences, like Jesus, declaring the “good news” of God’s grace, love, and blessing.

Tuesday, March 12, 2019

Read Romans 8.

Let us focus on verses 14-17, where Paul lifts up that those “*who are led by the Spirit of God*” as Jesus was into the wilderness, through ministry, and to the cross, are “*sons of God.*” Paul goes on to say, “*The Spirit Himself bears witness to our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs...*”

At Jesus’ baptism, he learned, as the heavens were torn open, that he was unconditionally “*God’s Beloved Son.*” Rodney J. Hunter writes, “*...is it not precisely this message that we ourselves are privileged to hear and to learn in the gospel of Jesus Christ? Granting theological primacy and uniqueness to Jesus as God’s Beloved Son, must we not also claim, in response to him and through him, that in our own unique and different ways we too are sons and daughters of God? Must we not also recognize that through him we too have been given a name, an identity, and a worth and dignity as human beings that is rooted and grounded with all the saints in the eternal, unconditioned, unalterable being and love of God? If we can hear this voice, which transcends all earthly voices, anchoring our existence, identity, and worth eternally in God, can we not also hear the challenge to believe it, to live it, and to declare its truth for every woman and man who is, was, or ever shall be?*”

We, too, are God’s children and thus, called to live out our divine name, to bear it with honor. I John 3: 1 tells us, “*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!*” Thus, as

“children of God,” out of love and obedience to our Heavenly Father, we offer ourselves, as Paul writes in Romans 12, as *“a living and holy sacrifice...giv[ing] our bodies to God because of all he has done for you.”*

We set out on our mission, we serve our purpose, we fulfill our role and ministry, we share God’s love, not out of obligation, but out of love and devotion to the One who has adopted us as His Sons and Daughters. We want others to recognize their adoption. Pray and ask God to show you what God wants you to do for Him, and to remind you of your “adoption” as His Son or Daughter, to remind you of His tremendous love for you.

Wednesday, March 13, 2019

Read John 19: 17-30 and Matthew 16: 13-28.

When God comes into one’s life, God tears the heart, opens the eyes, changes one’s world, and begins to transform a life into the likeness of His Son. This tearing and transformation is ongoing in the life of a Christian, as one is thrust into *“liminal space.”* Suddenly we stand between two different planes of existence, two truths, two worlds. The world in which we move and have our being, and God’s Kingdom which stands above and beyond that which we know. If we attempt to live in both worlds we become frustrated, burned-out, and fail to recognize the depth of relationship that God is offering us; we fail to fulfill our God-given purpose and mission.

Marilyn Mccord Adams writes, *“Unless we are willing to let old identities dissolve and allow ourselves to be reshaped into crucifixion-resurrection disciples, our sense of divine vocation is fraught with demonic potential.”* In other words, if we try to keep our feet in both worlds, this world will tempt us

away from God, and like Peter in the courtyard, we will deny the Savior.

Like Christ, we must carry our cross, even when it sets us up against the world in which we live. Charles Spurgeon writes, *“You carry the cross after Him. You have blessed company; your path is marked with the footprints of the Lord. The mark of His blood-red shoulder is upon the heavy burden. It’s His cross, and He goes before you as a shepherd goes before His sheep. Take up your cross daily, and follow Him.”*

Pray that God will help you in the continual process of allowing your worldly identity with its many desires and self-centered priorities to dissolve so that your Christ-centered identity can continue to emerge. Ask God to help you fight against the temptations of the world that would pull you away and cause you to deny Him. Ask God to help you fight the temptation to stand in both worlds and to surrender to Him.

Thursday, March 14, 2019

Read Acts 9: 1-22.

What a great example Paul is when it comes to all we have talked about this week. Paul was willing to allow his life to be transformed by Christ and recognized immediately that he could not have his feet in both worlds. This understanding set him against many people and resulted in tremendous suffering.

As a persecutor of Christians, a Pharisee, a man who spoke vehemently against the Christian faith, Paul was touched by Christ, went into the wilderness blind for three days, and then came out, like Christ, prepared and resolute, setting his face toward fulfilling his mission. Paul’s transformation from Pharisee to Christian, from persecutor to encourager, from killing those who professed Christ to being willing to die for

Christ, was total. Paul found the “*narrow way that leads to life*” and found peace and purpose, even in the midst of great suffering.

Paul would write to the Ephesians, “*When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. The Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong. And my you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is.*”

It was this love that changed Paul’s life. It was this love that transformed him and “*reorganized*” his life. It was this love that allowed him to fight temptations, stand against the world, suffer in peace, fulfill his mission “*to make disciples*” and it was this love that moved him to bear the “*cross of Christ.*”

Think about Paul’s story. How does it compare to your own? Reflect on God’s love and allow the acknowledgment of such love for you to “*reorganize*” your life, and help you fight temptation, stand against the world, suffer in peace, fulfill your mission, and bear the “*cross of Christ.*”

Friday, March 15, 2019

**Read Matthew 11:30; Matthew 6:33; Romans 12:2;
Psalm 51.**

The forty days of Lent is modeled after Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness. Consider these forty days approaching the celebration of Easter, the Resurrection, as a camping trip. What do you take and what do you leave as you move forward toward Easter and following God the rest of your life? What is essential

to carry and what is not? What so-called necessities may become discarded baggage later in life? If you encounter “wild animals,” as Jesus did in the wilderness, will you pack up and go home, or continue to press forward? Use the time and silence of Lent to consider these questions. Ask God to help you begin to lighten your pack, to help you focus on the essentials, and to walk with you on the journey.

Saturday, March 16, 2019

Take time with God today! Curl up in His lap & share your heart as you journey through Lent with the Creator. Remember to invite someone to church tomorrow.



What God Gave Up for Lent

John 3:16