

Feb 21, 2021 First Sunday in Lent ~ Service of Word and Prayer

We are using parts of the Service of the Word liturgy this morning, from your green hymn book, the Lutheran Book of Worship, page 126. The prayers are based on Sundays & Seasons. Shut off all the distractions in your home. Enjoy the quiet for a bit – take in some deep breaths. Light your candle. May your family be blessed in this time together.

The Gathering

Greeting: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Call to Worship:

God of the ages, who sweeps throughout the whole of history: we are but simple creatures who need your guidance and care. It is to you we turn in our sadness and joy; in our despair and in our triumphs. You protect us and uphold us, your presence enfolds us. Hear us as we come together in worship. May our prayers be from our hearts, and may our ears be open to your words. Amen.

Hymn: LBW 228-229 / ELW 503-505 - A Mighty Fortress is our God

God has made us his people through our Baptism into Christ. Living together in trust and hope, we confess our faith.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.*

On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Lord be with you ~ and also with you.

Prayer of the day: Everlasting God, you give strength to the weak and power to the faint. Make us agents of your healing and wholeness, that your good news may be made known to the ends of your creation, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, Amen.

The Word

The readings today are given by **Ruth Stiefelmeyer**

The Old Testament lesson is from **Genesis 9: 8-17**

Psalms 25:1-10, found on page 226

The New Testament lesson is from **1 Peter 3:18-22**

Please rise for the gospel lesson. *Holy, Holy, Holy, our hearts adore you. Our hearts are glad to say the words: you are Holy God.*

Gospel: Mark 1:9-15 Sermon by Pastor Norine

The gospel of Mark tells of this event in Jesus' life in 6 short verses. The same Spirit that descends upon Jesus at his baptism now drives him out into the wilderness.

Usually, the words desert or wilderness in scripture are always a sign or a symbol of grave spiritual danger. The word wilderness became shorthand for the devil's realm, for temptation, for threats to life, limb, and also to soul. If we are going to follow Jesus to the cross during Lent, then we have to start where he started - where John the Baptist started. We have to start out in the wilderness.

John went out there first to declare the fulfillment of those prophecies that foretold God's plan to build a salvation highway—a road back to shalom-peace - starting right there in that dangerous desert.

Jesus then joins John in the desert but is no sooner baptized and hailed as God's beloved Son before he is *driven* – into the wilderness by the same Spirit that just earlier had descended upon him and conferred to him God's profound blessing.

I wonder if we can look at the struggles around us in 2021 in light of this story and ask, "Even though we did not wish for this pandemic, how might God be at work through this difficult period of our lives? What can we glean from this time? How might God use us to help others? Is our temptation to think that God is not present? It gives one lots to think about . . .

In one moment Jesus has high credibility as he was pronounced as being God's beloved Son. Then he is immediately thrown into a vulnerable position. This was a taunting and daunting desert time dueling words with you know who – the evil one. Did this desert time enable Christ to lead authentically? Did the temptations that he experienced prepare him to have compassion for others perhaps to understand others better.

It may seem a trite example but years ago on the TV series M*A*S*H the unit's priest, Fr. Mulcahy, tried to talk with a wounded soldier who had been severely traumatized by what he witnessed on the front lines of the war. But when this soldier discovers that the good Father had never been anywhere close to where the fighting of the war was taking place, he concludes they just cannot talk. The soldier had no interest in hearing the pious platitudes of one who had no idea

what he was talking about. Later in the episode, after Mulcahy does come under enemy fire and is forced to perform an emergency medical procedure on a soldier even as shells are exploding all around him, the soldier welcomes the Father after all. *Now they have a common frame of reference, now they can talk. Now Mulcahy gets it.*¹

Jesus could not say the kingdom was near until he had been to the front lines, until he had engaged the evil of this world head on in the wilderness. Because then when he spoke words of hope and promise, everyone could know that this was someone who had engaged the jagged edges of real life in a fallen world and had even so emerged victorious. *“The features to this world that make us need the coming of God’s kingdom will not thwart the advent of that same kingdom. The post-wilderness Jesus was living proof.”*²

That’s all Mark says in his typically spare way of writing Jesus enters situations of despair and isolation and leave behind him an abundance of hope and community.

Notice that Jesus’ baptism came immediately before his temptation. Some theologians conclude that receiving his identity as God’s child was essential to weathering the temptations and struggles to come. Similarly, the identity given us at Baptism is what guides us through the challenges and struggles that await us on our journey as well. It was the *Spirit* that drove Jesus into the wilderness. Why? Did Jesus *need* to be in the wilderness for some reason? Did this wilderness experience of struggle and temptation provide something else that was essential to His ministry?

We don't know for sure, of course, as Mark doesn't say. I assume that indeed the Spirit's prompting wasn't random, that the Spirit drove Jesus to the wilderness with some purpose. And if we can imagine that, then we may also look at some of the *wilderness places* we have chosen to go to recently and wonder the same thing for us as individuals.

Lent begins in the wilderness. We are so tempted to stay put, to stay comfortable, and stay safe, and yet God's Spirit continues to grab hold of us, and throw us out, into the wilderness parts of the world, not only to stand with, walk with, and lift up those who are hurting, but also to share the love and promise of God with them. Maybe that's why the Spirit keeps throwing us out there – into the wilderness – because when we walk with each other, and lift each other up in our pain and struggles – even in the simplest way, God is right there with us, giving us hope, providing us peace, and transforming our wilderness into sacred space!

Amen

Hymn: WOV647 / ELW 305 - When Jesus Came to Jordan

Our Response

OFFERING PRAYER

Gracious God, receive our gifts as you receive us. Nourish us anew in your tender care, and empower us in faithful service to tend to others with this same love, through Jesus Christ our saving grace. **Amen.**

Prayers of the People by Ruth Stiefelmeyer

Relying on the promises of God, we pray boldly for the church, the world, and all in need. *A brief silence.*

In Jesus your realm has come near to us in every place and time. Give your church throughout the world a spirit of humility and repentance; teach us to trust always in the good news of your salvation. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You have made a covenant of mercy with every living creature. Protect all the earth's creatures from destruction. Empower the work of biologists, conservationists, and science educators. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

All your paths are steadfast love and faithfulness. Direct the words and actions of leaders in our community and throughout the world, that they may maintain justice for the lowly. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Even in the wilderness you are with us. Walk alongside migrants and refugees crossing dangerous lands. Tend to those whose lives feel desolate. Give healing and strength to all who suffer. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

In the covenant of baptism you claim us as beloved children. Nurture us in our baptismal identity and teach us to live within it for the sake of others. Strengthen this congregation's ministries of care and concern. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

In baptism you join us to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We praise you for all those who have died trusting in your faithfulness. Bring us with them to the fullness of your reign. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We entrust ourselves and all our prayers to you, O faithful God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The peace of Christ be with you always and also with you.

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray **The Lord's Prayer:**

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;

and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn: LBW 339 / ELW 313 - O Lord, Now Let Your Servant

Benediction

God the creator strengthen you; Jesus the beloved fill you; and the Holy Spirit the comforter keep you in peace. Amen.

Dismissal Go in peace. Be the light of Christ.

Thanks be to God.