

Sermon

February 21, 201 Lent 1

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As we begin the season of Lent for the next 40 days, we, as followers of Christ, are tasked to reflect on ourselves and our faith. We do this through fasting, prayer, meditation, study and reading. The focus on ourselves is a chance to look at the baggage we have in our lives that bog us down. We need to take an inventory of our baggage and what we really need to bring along moving our faith journey forward.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus is sent on a journey in the wilderness for 40 days and tempted by Satan. But once again, Mark does not fill in many of the blanks.

What were the temptations? In Luke and Matthew, we are told that the temptations are 1. Hunger and satisfaction, the needs of the flesh, 2. Pride and might, the needs of the ego and 3. Kingdoms and wealth, the need for materialism. Instead, today we see Mark jumps right into the 40 days and leaves it up to us to flush out what Jesus was experiencing.

Have any of you gone on a solo trip in the wilderness? I have friends that have taken a National Outdoor Leadership School course, which always culminates with a solo experience. You are left by yourself for several days to a week in the wilderness. Just you and all the wild has to offer. They have told me that this was

unlike anything they have experienced in their lives. Most of them felt prepared and knew it was coming at the end of the course, but they still had a bit of apprehension. The powerful thing for most of them was being totally alone. I would like you to think about the last time you were totally alone. Not just by yourself. No way to reach out to anyone for anything totally dependent on yourself and surroundings for everything. It can be scary and petrifying.

I belong to and lead a search and rescue team as part of the Air Force Auxiliary. We tend to have a hard time finding the single missing person because they keep moving. They do not stay put and wait for help. And with most after search interviews, the people usually keep moving because they think they know the way out and most importantly they did not like the feeling of being alone. When we have a group of people going missing, they tend to stay together and stay put, which makes them easier to find. Community is comfort and safety.

How did Jesus survive for 40 days with no one else? Or was there someone else with him?

Getting ready to take a trip (which we all hope we can do when this COVID thing is over) is for most of us is a fun and enjoyable process. Picking out where we are going, what sites to see, where are we going to eat, what cool hotel are we going to stay at. But then the other shoe drops. What to pack? I annoy Chris on this point, I

can get up in the morning, we are planning on leaving and be all packed in 15 minutes. Now granted, I do not need to match the jewelry with the outfits, so that does save time. If you are flying, we are constricted by how many bags we can bring and how much they weigh. We need to make choices and prioritize what is needed and what we can get by without and leave behind.

This time of Lent is a chance for us to evaluate and prioritize what we need for our faith journey. What do we need to pack and what baggage can we leave behind? We cannot take it all with us as it will bog us down as we move forward. That baggage that is bogging us down is also keeping us in the same place or sliding backwards. During this next 40 days prior to Easter is a time for us to focus on our spiritual housekeeping and faith growth. During Lent, we tend to focus on giving something up to become a better person. But first we need to look inward before we can look outward. Our focus should be on those things that we have control over, inward focus then look outward to help and serve our family and community.

At our Ash Wednesday service, I talked about the power each one of us has to forgive. No one can make us forgive, we have total control over it. Think about that power, it is more powerful than money, political control or even the needs of the flesh. You are in total control but more importantly there is not a limit to forgiving. We haven't been given only 1000 forgiveness tokens for our life time to be given out protectively. God has given us the power of an unlimited supply of

forgiveness. God has set the example of having an unlimited supply of forgiveness and grace for all of us human beings. I encourage you to take some time to fast, pray and think about forgiveness during this lent season.

Be aware of the temptation of Satan that will try to creep into that thought process to shift our focus to forgive only those you like or favor. Don't let the darkness direct the power of forgiveness that God has given all of you.

When Jesus went to the desert or wilderness, he did not pack bags for 40 days, he didn't have time, the Spirit drove him out into the wilderness. He was tempted by Satan, scared by wild beasts, and helped by angels. But still he was alone with his thoughts. And this is not the only time that Jesus went out by himself to regroup and focus on what is important. As we go through life, we will all experience these moments and times of wilderness or desert. I can think of many that have occurred in my time here on earth. Like what to do after graduating High School, should I become a parent and father, switching careers, divorce and marriage and deaths of loved ones. Yes, we all will experience these times in our lives but what is really important is what happens next.

Jesus survived his 40 days in the wilderness, what did he do next? He did not give up. He moved his message forward going out to preach God's good news for everyone. He did not dwell in the suffering he experienced, he refocused and

continued on. It is not easy for us, when you feel you are at the bottom of the well of your life's journey to see the sunshine coming down from above. We all need to remember that we are never alone. God is always with us whether we see it or not.

In today's Gospel from Mark, God did not step in and help Jesus. God let it play out because he knew his Son would get through it. And since we are all beloved children of God, we will get the same support and care.

So as Lent continues over the next month and a half, let us all take time to reflect on our baggage and what can be discarded or left behind, focusing our energies on forgiveness. We also have been given the gift of time to look at our own times in the wilderness and what we learned from it and then how did we move ahead on our life's journey.