**Search for the rainbow in your heart!**

**by Sharon Fenn**

Today is the first Sunday of Lent. Lent is a period of 40 days that Christians observe between Ash Wednesday and Easter. It is spiritual preparation. Amid torrential rain, when you know that sun has been forecast for the afternoon, do you wait, and look, and wonder if a rainbow will appear? Do you see a rainbow as a sign of hope?

I thought of this when I read Genesis, Chapter 9: vs. 8-17. God spoke to Noah stating he would make a covenant with Noah and his sons as well as all his descendants. He even included the animals. A covenant is an agreement to do or not to do something. God promised that the earth would never again be destroyed by a flood. As a sign of this promise, he put a rainbow in the clouds.

During the Lenten season, some people fast or give something up that make them happy, such as chocolate. It is a practice of saying no to our desires and put more focus on spending time with God. I see the season of lent as a period of contemplation. As I read the gospel of Mark, chapter 1 vs. 9-15, I thought about vs 12 and 13:

12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness to prepare him for his ministry. While he was there, he encountered Satan. Satan is depicted as an accuser or adversary, someone who resisted Jesus’ ministry. Jesus experienced three primary temptations. In the first temptation, Satan said that if Jesus were truly God’s son, he could turn a stone into bread. Was he inferring that Jesus could not trust God to get him through his period of fasting? Jesus responded, “Human beings cannot live on bread alone.” (Matthew 4 vs. 4). I think, although we need sustenance, by providing our body with food, Jesus implied we humans need more. We do need to trust God to provide all our needs. It is important to tend to our spiritual needs and not succumb to temptation. Next, Satan presented Jesus with a second temptation. He showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and promised him wealth and power. Jesus responded, “The scripture says, “Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.” (Matthew 4 vs. 6). Do we bow to our ego, and embrace power or do we put our trust in God? Finally, Satan told Jesus to jump from the apex of the temple in hopes God would save him. Jesus responded by telling Satan, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” (Mathew 4, v. 12.) You get the point. Jesus did not take the bait. Do you think Jesus’ time in the wilderness was a meditative retreat? I think not. I think it was a long 40 days. Kristen Vincent in her book “We are Beloved” says, “For forty days he struggles. He is hungry and lonely and tired. He comes across wild animals and is tempted by Satan. The fact that the wilderness experience immediately follows the voice from God tells me that Jesus needs time for stillness to figure out what it means to be God’s beloved. He needs time to question it, to fight it, and try it on for size. He needs time to spend time in wonder before he can own it. “

Today, we are tempted by all kinds of things as well – we may want to sit in front of the television set or the computer with a bag of chips or a piece of chocolate cake. Advertisements of fantastic sales may draw us in when we are trying to save money.

A dear friend reminded me of the more recent trials and temptations we have all been experiencing. To wear a mask or not wear a mask! It truly is a habit we all must get into for our own safety as well as others. It is exceedingly difficult wearing a mask sometimes, especially if you already have breathing problems, such as asthma or COPD. It can also be annoying as you maneuver your cart through the supermarket aisles and knock things off the shelves as your glasses fog up. This pandemic is frightening. For many of us, it has hit awfully close to home as we have lost loved ones or waited patiently for someone dear to recover.

When we first closed the church last year, I think we all thought it was our own 40-day test. Can you believe it has been almost a year?

Jesus did not let Satan entice him while in the desert; we need not be tempted either if we are trying to give something up for lent or spend more time talking to God. I think there is a more important message here. Can we focus on not being distracted by temptations so we can do God’s work? May I suggest on our Lenten journey this year, we focus on the heart.

In the year 2021, I am not going to wander off into a desert. It is not even feasible for me to tell my employer; I am going to take 40 days off because I need some quiet time to think about my life and where it is going. During this pandemic, it is a little easier to sequester myself and stay safe. It certainly has given me a lot of time to think. It is scary, but vaccines are now available in phases: a sign of hope, a rainbow. Remember last year, when we all showed up in the church parking lot for Easter and listened to our bell ringing. I think for all of us, this was a sign of hope. And we continued to receive God’s blessings as we worshiped outside during the summer months.

What have we learned and how can we focus on God’s work? Can we continue to learn by taking a 40-day journey into our heart. How can we help others? I read Linda Santry’s letter the Mission and Outreach Committee inserted into the annual report. It made me cry. Tears of joy! St. Ann’s, Cochesett Methodist church and we at First Church brought love and happiness to 35 families, 90 children, 30 teen mothers and their 32 babies, and 71 senior citizens in the Christmas Sharing Program. I echo Pastor Steve’s message in the annual report on how Jane Hatch and the numerous volunteers helped make our Harvest Marketplace a success raising funds to keep this congregation going. We have become creative problem solvers.

Let us take this time to think about how we can be kind and generous, caring, and thoughtful. How can we be more loving? And certainly, how can we be more peaceful? I am incredibly sad for this nation right now. Can we take the time to treat each other fairly?

Wouldn’t it be nice if kindness turned into a virus that spread like wildfire?

I love this church and all we do here. Let us take this season of lent, these 40 days and think about how we can set an example here and in the community.

Go out into the world today and find that rainbow in your heart and let us look forward to Easter with hope!