

Year B 1st Sunday in Lent In the Wilderness Mrk 1 9 to 15

A lot of preachers and bible study attenders will hear a piece of Scripture and then be asked or told how does this apply to our lives today? Scripture, though, is not about us. Scripture is about God – whether it is about Father, Son, or Holy Spirit, Scripture is about God. Scripture tells us the story of God’s relentless and steadfast striving to achieve his love-filled purpose – to bring all of creation, people and planet, into perfect relationship with each other and with God, to fully bring into being God’s kingdom. Once we know where our piece of Scripture fits into that Story, how it helps us better understand that Story, better understand God, we can then take what we have learned and ask “How can I use what I know about God and God’s purpose to shape my life?”

Perhaps you think I’m being super picky about wording here. How is my question any different from “applying” Scripture to my life? How is allowing Scripture to “shape my life” different from “applying” it to my life? Maybe it’s not obvious but it’s crucial...it’s about the way we have been trained to think and it’s about thinking in a new way. To apply Scripture to our lives is about taking a moral, a lesson learned, and fitting it into what we’re already doing. If you have learned that a hot stove is painful to touch, you are not going to touch it anymore. It changes what you do when you are working in your kitchen but it does not transform your life. Applying Scripture to our lives, fitting it into what we’re doing, can change us a little but it will not transform. We cannot take the glory and grandeur of God, the immensity and earth-shattering nature of God’s purpose and fit it into our human thinking and our human activities. We must take our human thinking and our human activities and give them into God, allow God to

take them and shape them, change human thinking into kingdom thinking, human activities into kingdom activities, human lives into kingdom lives.

It's all in the direction...applying God to our lives puts God into a pretty small space. But opening our lives up to God, to be shaped by God places us into the vastness of God's loving purpose that is aimed at changing not only us but all of humanity. It places us into God's kingdom which is not only present within each of us but in all things – visible and invisible.

If it sounds like an immense transformation...it is. If it sounds like it will be a long, ongoing process...it will be. When we encounter God in Word and in worship, that encounter changes us. It shapes us, slowly but surely into a new creation conformed to the image of Christ. And it can start with the tweaking of a question we ask ourselves. How can I let what I've learned shape my life?

The Gospel that we heard today is a perfect example for us reflect on this as we embark on a journey through Lent in which most if not all of us are consciously thinking of how we can be closer to God, how to let our lives be shaped by this increased closeness to God.

Throughout Lent, we are always looking forward to the cross. It is our journey toward the cross – to Jesus' death and to his resurrection. It is a journey for us that began with our baptism because it was through baptism that we were joined to Christ. In baptism we experience the mystery of participating in his death and resurrection – symbolically dying with Christ so that we will also be raised with Christ. In our baptism we are clothed with Christ, made a new creation so that his righteousness can be our righteousness, his relationship with the Father becomes our relationship with the Father. Our journey begins with baptism because that is

exactly where Jesus began his. His journey to the cross started today at his baptism.

When Jesus emerged from the water, the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove and God's voice claimed him as his own. When we were baptized, I am quite sure no one saw a dove alight on our heads and nobody heard a voice thunder from heaven to claim us as God's own...and yet, that is precisely what happened – precisely what happened. On the day we were baptized, the Spirit rested on us and God claimed us.

We know from the story we heard today that, when the Spirit rests on us he is not there for a holiday. The Spirit has a mission to fulfill God's purpose – to pull all things into perfect relationship with God through Christ. When we were baptized, we became a part of that purpose, marked as Christ's own forever to become a sign of the coming perfection, a witness to that coming perfection, and to be an instrument for the fulfillment of God's purpose through the work of the Spirit.

The Spirit has work to accomplish and so Mark tells us that the Spirit immediately drove Jesus into the wilderness. The wilderness has deep significance in our Scriptures. When God rescued his people from the oppression and consumerism of the empire of Egypt, they entered the wilderness. This was the time and this was the place where God would mold their hearts and minds to pull them away from the ingrained thinking and lifestyle of empire toward the thinking and lifestyle of being God's people. Worship of the one true God would form in their minds, and in their very core, the love beyond all human love, the peace beyond all human peace, the equality and freedom God desires for his creation. When they "got it", when they could see the way forward in God's world, God led them

forward into their new life with him. The Israelites struggled with this time of transformation just as we do. They spent 40 years struggling with it in the wilderness. It is so easy to slip into the imperfection of our humanity because we are human. But the other important thing to notice about being in the wilderness, is that God is there too. God was present with the Israelites – a presence they could see, a presence they could hear – a presence to lean on, to guide them in their tumultuous time of discernment, learning how to live according to God's ways.

Today we hear of Jesus' time in the wilderness for 40 days – a deliberate echo of the 40 years in the wilderness. Baptized and sent with the Spirit – with God's presence – into the wilderness for a time of tumultuous discernment, struggling to turn his humanity completely toward God. When he had entered the water of his baptism, he had been Jesus of Nazareth – Mary and Joseph's son. Because of his baptism, though, God reveals his sonship – you are my Son God told him, and through his time in the wilderness Jesus claims that identity and is transformed. Leaning on God, Jesus opens his humanness up to God to be transformed into the Son of God, knowing and following God's purpose for his life. Baptized, transformed, and sent into the world.

Ash Wednesday marked 40 days until Easter – a deliberate echo of Jesus' time in the wilderness, a deliberate echo of the 40 years in the wilderness. This is our wilderness journey – baptized and driven into the wilderness by the Spirit – with God's presence. This is our time to lean on God, to turn our humanness to God to be transformed. To claim our identity as God's child. This is our time to open ourselves to God with us – to discern and to follow God's purpose for our lives.

Baptized, transformed, and sent into the world. For us, the transformation is ongoing, a continuous struggle that does not end after 40 days but neither does God's presence leave us after the 40 days. The Spirit of God who rests on us at our baptism, the God who claimed us as his children remains with us in our struggle to be transformed into the perfection desired and intended for us.

During these 40 days of our wilderness journey, and beyond, rather than trying to fit God into our lives by taking on an extra prayer time or giving up dessert, let us use that time as we pray, as we skip dessert, to consciously picture giving our lives over into the vastness of our God, a God who embraces us within that vastness. The God who is always near us, the God who is always ready for that turning toward him will take the life you offer. God will take that life, and will shape that life and we will be the ones baptized, transformed, and sent.