

The First Sunday in Lent
Deuteronomy 26: 1-11
Luke 4:1-13

The Rev. Lyn Zill Briggs
Episcopal Church of the Resurrection
10 March 2019

We just said farewell to the Epiphany season, when we learned a little more Sunday by Sunday who Jesus was --- a gift to all peoples, a worker of signs and wonders, the beloved of God as revealed in all his glory on the Mount of Transfiguration.

We continue those revelations as we embark on our Lenten journey. On Ash Wednesday, we were reminded that we are both flawed and forgiven, and that there is nothing we can do to keep God from loving us. On this First Sunday in Lent, we see Jesus learning more about his belovedness and his call to serve. The Spirit has just whisked him into the wilderness, and Jesus is being led to figure out what his mission might be.

Time in the wilderness serves many purposes. Not only does it clarify Jesus' work for Jesus himself, but the early church, which first read these stories, was then able to identify Jesus with the heritage of Israel and the fulfillment of Scripture.

The passage from Deuteronomy tells us that the children of Israel had to figure that out as well. They were continually being reminded who they were. Much of what we do in our liturgy is remembering who we are, remembering what God has done, remembering what God has promised to do for us.

We re-member our ancestors in faith and invite them to stand with us as we praise God and receive communion each week. Jesus had ancestors in faith, too. He was raised on their stories. Now he is called upon to integrate them into his ministry. Jesus may be in the desert by himself, but he is surrounded by the ancestors of his faith and supported by his knowledge of God's word that they also knew and loved. Jesus was never really alone in that desert because he knew scripture. It became the living word of God to him. Its words gave voice to his faith. Having been confronted by three tempting scenarios, Jesus finds strength in the scripture: the treasure of collective memory and wisdom of God's boundless goodness and trustworthiness.

Without being grounded in scripture, we are tempted to believe that it is all up to us, that we can be faithful all by ourselves, that somehow God doesn't understand us, and nothing will ever be right. We do not study the word of God as a merely academic exercise. We invite God's words to settle into our hearts to become part of who we are and what we do. We study the word of God so that God can transform us and move us into deeper relationship with the Holy. So that we will never be alone in the wilderness.

The temptations Jesus faced in the wilderness were not one time, exclusive- to- the- Son- of- God temptations. Here's what Satan threw before Jesus: Putting one's needs before anything else. The very real temptation to trust yourself rather than God. The temptation to take the easy, comfortable way and not God's way. Do any of those sound familiar to you?

The most difficult temptations are the subtle ones. Because the things we might be talked into aren't necessarily evil in themselves. Such as turning stones into bread after 40 days without food.

I can truthfully say I can resist the BIG temptations. For instance, as I walk around my neighborhood, I've always been able to resist breaking into a neighbor's home and carrying off their valuables. I've never

had to talk myself out of tagging a freeway overpass with graffiti. And I've never seriously considered murdering anyone. Those are not the temptations that are going to get me into trouble or damage my relationship with God.

Here are some of the temptations I face:

It is always tempting to me as your priest to only tell you that you are loved by God and to make sure you only feel good when you leave this place. I'm more comfortable in this pulpit when I can make you laugh and have you like me, rather than challenge you and perhaps make you uncomfortable.

It is tempting for me to take the easy road and NOT stir things up. I am tempted to think if I just work hard, I can get it all done. And I forget to take time to pray, and perhaps just let things rest in God's time.

Jesus too was tempted to 1) meet his own needs 2) dazzle people with what he could accomplish and 3) take the easy path. None of those are evil things. But if he'd succumbed to any of those things, they would have interfered with God's mission and his place in it.

If we let our own needs, our own accomplishments or our comfort interfere with being who God called us to be or do, they would be sin for us. That is, they would be a barrier to growth and mission and God's purpose for us at Resurrection.

During Lent, we are called once again to embrace an intentional life of commitment and faithfulness. It's not the most comfortable way and it won't be the easiest way. But I take encouragement in the fact that the Spirit didn't just drop Jesus off in the wilderness. The Spirit led Jesus to and through the wilderness, the unknown. Being chosen and anointed and beloved wasn't Jesus' final preparation for ministry. Jesus learned to trust God in the wilderness and so must we.

It was in the wilderness that Israel was birthed as a people. It is the place from which prophets speak. The wilderness is a place of discernment where things become clearer.

As the Church of the Resurrection we are always in the wilderness. Not a bad dry place, but a place of discernment where we learn to trust God with our future, and to guide God's mission. To make sure our mission aligns with God's mission. We might occasionally forget whose we are, as did the children of Israel, and wander a bit. We might be tempted let our needs replace our mission. We might be tempted to let our love of comfort distract us from discipleship. We might let our insecurities and fears manifest themselves in the mistrust of others and God. How do I know this? Because these are the core of the temptations faced by Israel, the same temptations faced by Jesus. The same struggles that are always with me and all God's people.

Struggles with temptation and discernment are part of every worthwhile journey, but the Spirit who placed us here is indeed leading us and moving us forward through the unknown territory before us.

May we be good stewards of the struggles we share with the people of God in the desert and with Jesus. May the Spirit move us through our struggles so that God's mission will flourish among the people of the Church of the Resurrection.