

Genesis 9:8-17

Psalm 25:1-10

1 Peter 3:18-22

Mark 1:9-15

Sermon February 18th, 2024

God Is Present Even When We are Sent into the Wilderness

In our gospel, Jesus is driven into the wilderness by the Spirit of God. I don't know about you, but this detail in the temptation story is confusing, and uncomfortable to hear. Some of us may be asking why the Spirit of God could do this to Jesus? Send him to a place where he will more than likely suffer from the powers that defy God (**Image One:** picture of the wilderness/desert with demons flying around).

In addressing this question, many of us focus on the idea that Jesus needs to go through these temptations to prove that he will not falter in his calling. But maybe the Spirit also wants to help him see that in his calling to proclaim the good news of God's kingdom come to the people in Galilee and Judea, he will face struggle. He will face suffering. He will face the forces that defy God. This calling will be anything but easy. And the Spirit wants to make sure he doesn't go into this ministry with rose colored goggles. The Spirit wants to make sure he is prepared to face these struggles (**Image One**).

Because we see all the struggles that Jesus faces when the gospel narrative continues. We see the struggles when Jesus is almost driven off a cliff for proclaiming the good news of God's kingdom come in his home town. We see the struggles between good and evil in the many exorcisms Jesus performs. We see the struggles when Jesus faces ridicule from some who are in a place of authority, because of his teachings. We see the struggles when Jesus is scolded by some including some of his own followers for hanging out with people who are perceived as outcasts. We see the struggles when the leaders of the Empire see Jesus as a threat, and decide to crucify him (**Image One**).

Jesus faces a lot of struggles, a lot of pain, as he proclaims God's kingdom come.

Jesus' experience with Satan and the wild beasts prepares him for what he will face from those in authority who challenge his message, from the demons he will encounter, from the people in his home town community, and from the very Empire that he will challenge with his message (**Image One**).

I don't know about you, but my first thought is why does Jesus even want to go through with all of this? And my second thought is how will Jesus be able to stay on task and proclaim the good news of God's kingdom come in the face of such struggles?

Well, as we see in our gospel, that even in the wilderness where Jesus is challenged, and threatened, the angels tend to him. Jesus isn't alone. God is present in the wilderness (**Image Two:** picture of angels tending to Jesus).

In fact, according to our gospels, God is present in every challenge Jesus faces, while living out his calling.

Likewise, when the disciples take up their crosses and follow Jesus, they face struggle. They face suffering. They face persecution for proclaiming the good news of God's kingdom come (**Image One**).

And like Jesus, God is present with them in their challenges, first through the life of Jesus, then through the resurrected Christ, and then through the gift of the Holy Spirit that they receive on Pentecost (**Image Two**). Empowering them to continue to proclaim the good news of God's kingdom come even as they face persecution.

Likewise, as we take up our crosses and follow Jesus in our communities today, we too face struggle, suffering, as we continue to proclaim the good news of God's kingdom come (**Image One**).

We face people who don't like what we have to say. Who challenge us. Who make fun of us. Who hurt us violently in some instances. Who try to silence us.

We face people who feel uncomfortable when we hang out with people who have been labelled as outcasts in our community. We face people who decide to walk away from us, because of who we hang out with.

Like Jesus, like the disciples, sometimes we find ourselves in the wilderness facing Satan, living with the wild beasts. Feeling like we are constantly being challenged by the forces that defy God (**Image One**).

Sometimes it can be really hard for us to follow Jesus. To love one another as God loves us. To live out the kind of hospitality Jesus lives out in his everyday life.

As we enter another season of Lent, we reflect on the wilderness Journey of Jesus. We reflect on all the struggles Jesus faces in his proclamation of the good news of God's kingdom come. In his living out God's grace, hospitality, and love.

As we enter another season of Lent, we reflect on the wilderness journey of the disciples. We reflect on all the struggles the disciples face in their proclamation of the good news of God's kingdom come. In living out God's grace, hospitality, and love.

As we enter another season of Lent, we reflect on our own wilderness journey. We reflect on all the struggles we face as we proclaim the good news of God's kingdom come. As we live out God's grace, hospitality, and love.

For some of us, we fast from something during the season of Lent that we think we really need, so to, remember Jesus' struggle, the disciples struggle, our struggle (**Image One**). To remember that in order to take the call to follow Jesus seriously. To live out the hospitality Jesus lives out in the world. To stand with people who are mistreated. To speak out against injustice. We need to bear our crosses. We need to be able to face all the struggles, the challenges, that come our way.

But as we spend more time reflecting on the scriptures, on worship during this Lenten season. As we spend more time praying and being generous to others during this Lenten season. We see that when we proclaim the good news of God's kingdom come even in the wilderness, even as we face the struggles and challenges that come with this proclamation, we experience God. The angels care for us (**Image Two**). Jesus walks with us. The Holy Spirit empowers us. We bear witness to all that God is doing in this world to heal and redeem it.

Let us pray, gracious God, as we find ourselves standing in the wilderness, as we take up our crosses and follow you, help us endure the struggles we face. Help us see where you are present in the midst of our struggles. In the midst of our wilderness journey. And empower us to proclaim your good news of your kingdom come to all despite these struggles. Helping people see where you are healing and redeeming your creation. **Amen.**

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