

Sunday Sermon – March 6, 2022

Luke 4:1-13

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

It has been two long years, and I mean really long years - since we in this province had the Covid pandemic land on our beautiful prairie soil. It has been two very long years, here at McClure since we closed our doors to “in person” worship – we closed after celebrating our 20 year of covenant with Holy Spirit – we opened briefly during advent for in person worship and closed again while the delta wave did it’s thing. Today we are carefully - trusting each other to wear masks and keep our distance - hoping that we can continue to worship in person for the foreseeable future and reconnect with our community of faith.

During these two years of Covid we learned that black and brown lives are treated differently not only in the United States but also here in Canada. During these two years of Covid we have found the unmarked graves of little ones, ignored for decades but ever strong in their witness to the need for justice for Indigenous peoples. During these two years of Covid we have discovered how “truth” can be manipulated and distorted by conspiracy theories and twisted until it becomes unrecognizable. During these two years of Covid we have seen how economics is the measuring stick for decision making and not the public good. During these two years of Covid we learned that there are many deficits in our care for Older Adults and our health care system is extremely fragile. During these two years of Covid we have been challenged to think differently about mental health –

coming to see it is not the challenge of the few but given prolonged isolation and covid stress – mental health is the continual work of each one of us. During the last few days we are now experiencing a war, a full out invasion of a nation – I can hardly speak of what is going on in Ukraine without crying - our hearts break in solidarity with the people of Ukraine and of Russia who are devastated by this act of aggression. During these two years of Covid we experienced farmers struggled through a unprecedented drought we were reminded that climate change is still a thing. And last but by no means least, during these past two years of Covid we have lived in a soup of grief. Grief of the lose of those who have died from Covid, and who have died of other causes and who we have not been able to properly acknowledge through the gift of a community of faith - funeral. Some of us lost jobs. Some have missed life's milestone celebrations like weddings, birthdays and graduations. Babies have been born with out the support of grandparents and aunties and uncles all in an attempt to keep them safe. The worlds grief, our grief has been heavy.

So, friends on this first Sunday of Lent - let's talk wilderness experiences. Lord knows we get it. //

Only two of the four gospels give the long version of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, the story of his wilderness exam. John leaves it out of his gospel altogether and Mark's gospel covers the whole thing in two sentences: the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness, he was there forty days, Satan tempted him, wild beasts kept him company, and angels waited on him. That's it; that's all Mark knew--or that's all he thought we needed to know--about Jesus and Satan in the wilderness.

Today we have heard Luke's full version. And what this version proves, among other things, is that the devil is biblically savvy. The devil knows exactly where to find the Bible verses needed to put Jesus to the test, but Jesus *knows more* than what the **Bible says**. Jesus knows how to **do** what the Bible says, which is how he passes his wilderness exam.

Every time the devil offered him more--more bread, more power, more protection--Jesus turned him down. *No* to the bread, *no* to the kingdoms, *no* to the angelic bodyguards. Jesus tell the "evil one" that he is full up on worshipping God and serving God only. So by the end of the story, the devil still has all his bribes in his bag and Jesus is free to go.

Jesus and the devil did a lot of chatting in this story but today I want to focus on where this conversation took place --the **wilderness**--because I'm rather convinced that every one of us has already been in a wilderness place. If not in the past two years - then maybe it - looked like a hospital waiting room to you, or it was your old room back in your parent's home because you couldn't make it on your own, or maybe it was a noisy crowded room where everyone was laughing and having a wonderful time and you are there having just lost the love of your life. It may even have been a kind of wilderness in the middle of your own chest, where you begged for a word from God and heard nothing but your own breath.

"Wilderness" comes in so many shapes and sizes. And it goes without saying that such wilderness places are not the kind of places we seek out. Most of us, in fact, spend a lot of time and money trying to stay out of such places; but wilderness happens. Sooner or later, every one of us will get to take our own journey into the wilderness, our own trip to the desert to discover who we really are and what our lives are really about.

I guess that could sound like bad news, but I don't think it is. I think it can be good news--because even if no one ever wants to go there, and even if those of us who end up there want out again as soon as possible, the wilderness is still one of the most real, spirit-filled, life-changing places a person can be. Take Jesus, for instance:

How did Jesus end up there in the wilderness? The Spirit led him. **Led him** - didn't create the wilderness mess but walked with him into it. That is an important detail to note.

What was Jesus full of? He was full of The Holy Spirit.

What did he live on? Nothing.

How long was he there? Weeks and weeks.

How did he feel at the end? He was famished.

What did that long, famishing stretch in the wilderness do to him? It **freed** him--from all devilish attempts to distract him from his true purpose.

After forty days in the wilderness, Jesus had not only learned to manage his appetites; he had also learned to **trust the Spirit** that had led him there to lead him out again, with the kind of clarity and grit he could not have found anywhere else.////

This wisdom, about the value of the wilderness, is just about lost in our time, lost to popular culture for sure and lost even to the Christian tradition that is charged with preserving it. Those of us who still belong to churches that observe Lent get a little dose of it every year - and I think it is good for us. The **wisdom of lent is still needed**: that anyone who wants to follow Jesus needs the kind of clarity and grit that is found often in the wilderness. Many of us have already learned some things from our

wilderness experiences, some of us have built up some resilience, found strength we didn't know we had and wisdom worth treasuring and sharing.

Today we mark another Lenten experience - we are beginning another wilderness journey, lead by the spirit - we are invited once more to confront those things that keep us from experiencing the richness and beauty of life. We are asked in lent to **acknowledge** the wilderness and say "no" to those things that keep us from following the way of Jesus.

As we being Lent this year, I invite you to dive deep into the wilderness, with the spirits leading, to consider the wisdom found there. Given how much wilderness we have in our lives it is so easy to want to ignore it – turn aside - numb ourselves. But - at the Spirits leading - I invite you to dive deep into this years wilderness exam.

I know people who give up using their cell phones for Lent. I know other people who give up watching television or shopping. Of course, none of these things would impress people who have spent their whole lives trying to figure out where their next meal is coming from, but in a culture of plenty I am impressed with anyone who decides to make it without *anesthesia* for a while--to give up whatever appliances or habits or substances they use to keep themselves from feeling what it really feels like to be in the wilderness.

Once you take the headphones off, silence can be really *loud*. Once you turn off the television, a night can get really *long*. After a while you can start thinking that all of this quiet emptiness or, worst case, all this howling wilderness, is a sign of things gone badly wrong: devil on the loose, *huge* temptations, no help from the audience,

But if you remember to breathe--and say your prayers--then nine times out of ten you can make it through your first night. And then it is just one day at a time.//

It would be a mistake for me to try to describe your wilderness exam. Only you can do that, because only you know what devils have your number, and what kind of bribes they use to numb you out. All I know for sure is that a voluntary trip to the wilderness, this Lent is a great way to practice getting free of those devils - those things that keep you from your real life.

Remember what that long, famishing stretch in the wilderness did to Jesus? It *freed* him--from all devilish attempts to distract him from his true purpose.

After forty days in the wilderness, Jesus had not only learned to manage his appetites;{ he had also learned to trust the **Spirit** that had led him there to lead him out again}, with the kind of clarity and grit he could not have found anywhere else.

I pray that we might find, this Lent, where the spirit is leading us in our own lives, our community and our churches. I am so looking forward to see what grit we might find and how this wilderness time deepens our walking in the way of Jesus, our worship of God and our serving others. Amen.

Luke 4:1-15

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

May God bless to our understanding and our living these words of Holy Scripture. Amen