

## Lent I – B 02/18/24

Our Gospel lesson today puts Jesus in the wilderness. It is not a wilderness that we are used to in our part of the country. In our wilderness we think of different kinds of trees, streams or lakes. It is a place where hopefully we can experience peace and calmness.

This is not the wilderness that Jesus was experiencing. His wilderness is often described as a desert with probably only small bushes, if even that and little to no water close by. It also says in our Gospel lesson that Jesus was tested or tempted by satan. It doesn't sound like peace and calmness to me. Instead, it sounds like constant agitation and a climate that can be difficult to survive in.

So then, how can we relate to this type of wilderness, where there was probably no snow. One of my Old Testament professors at the Moravian Seminary suggested that this wilderness is akin to the world we live in. Not the physical climate necessarily, but the cultural and political climate that we have today.

The division in our country continues to grow. I fear for our country while going through this presidential election. We will have strong people on both sides and many who will be apathetic and think what is the purpose of voting. Voting is important. I would never tell you who to vote for, but only what to consider when you vote.

Gun violence continues and this past week was the one year anniversary of it at MSU. We heard about the gun violence in Kansas City this past week and this past week another college. This has become a political issue and Christians are divided on this and so many things. A threat to our national security was in the news this past week. All of the isms are alive and active.

The world is filled with war, Ukraine and Russia, Israel and Hamas, the bombings in the Red Sea and our retaliation. Our government can't decide on how to or not to assist. It has become more about politics. Please notice that I have not said democrat or republican. I believe all parties need to put aside something in order to work for the safety and betterment of our country which may then be more in line with God's law.

I do believe satan is alive and active in all of this unrest. We are being tested. Might God be saying to us how are we going to keep our covenant based on the two great commandments? Now, does this sound like the wilderness that Jesus was experiencing, where there was not much peace or calmness as he was being tested or tempted also not to live according to God's law, God's covenant.

What else does Mark say about Jesus' time in the wilderness? Matthew and Luke elaborate on three specific temptations. Mark says he was with the wild beasts and the angels waited on him.

There are a number of ways that we could look at the wild beasts. One is that they were in harmony with Jesus and maybe even somehow served him. Another way is that Jesus learned to live with wild beasts. In our wilderness there are people that we are required to interact with that we don't trust or clash with and we need to learn some way of relating to them.

The angels waited on him. We might picture the angels bringing him food and water. They may wash his feet. Whatever ways that we can imagine that could have happened as Mark does not define how they waited on him. Are there not days that we could use someone to wait on us? Frankly even going out to eat, where you don't have to cook or clean up can be, being waited on. At night, maybe even a libation. I believe if we are ready to receive it God does provide angels waiting on us through others.

This wilderness that we live in also brings us pain and sickness. Most of us have been there or are there and have experienced this. One of our own families, the Kopf family has experienced pain, sickness and death. This is when we can be lifted up on Eagle's wings and be held in the palm of God's hand. This comes from the familiar Psalm 91 which will be the Psalm for Lent 1 next year.

God can and does all of this, but what can we do here and now in the wilderness? The Psalm for today is one to pray. Some have suggested that it is possible that Jesus prayed this Psalm in the wilderness.

This Psalm is classified as a lament. The Psalm singer begins, To you, O Yahweh, I lift up my soul. Soul is defined as whole being. I am turning my whole being over to you God, is essentially what they are saying. I don't know where else to turn.

When we can do this we are ready to say, Make me to know your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths. Yes this is our verse for Lent. This 'to know', is not only knowledge, but it is asking God to teach us to the very core of our being. This relates to the intimacy that I was talking about in last week's sermon.

It is when we open ourselves up that we are better able to see God's path for our lives and for our beloved community. Our ability to be taught is that we acknowledge that we do not have all the answers and are open to learning. When we look at our wilderness, our reality is that we are still sinful people, and we are not seeing God's way clear enough.

Have we figured out yet that if and when we are willing to learn to God's ways, that it involves change on us as individuals and as a beloved community? When we learn new things about groups of people, our thinking changes as well as our language and actions. In order for growth to happen in any area of our life, first we learn and then we make changes.

Changes have been made here at Fatih and will continue to be made. This only occurs after we learn to know God's ways. I challenge us during this Lenten season to practice turning our lives over to God in Jesus Christ. Then we are more ready to pray, make me to know your ways, O God. Teach me your paths. In order to live in our wilderness today this is what we are called to do.