

Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement

We come to worship in Jesus' name acknowledging with gratitude the land where we are gathered. This is traditional and unceded Coast Salish Territory of Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ. We continue to pray that past and present injustices can be reconciled as we commit ourselves to just and respectful relationships.

□ *Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary (repeat)*

Lent Liturgy¹

On this first Sunday of Lent, we find Jesus in the wilderness, facing temptation. And forty days in the wilderness is a long time.

We too experience wilderness times of temptation, challenge and change.

Yet even in the wilderness and among the wild beasts the angels cared for Jesus.

As we make our way in the wilderness, we hear the good news that we are not alone — that the reign of God has come near in Christ.

PWS&D Story **Support Makes Dreams Within Reach**

In Malawi, 19-year-old Innocent Lazalo lost both parents at a young age. Despite the challenges this created, Innocent was determined to succeed and make a better life for himself. He knew that education was the key to his future, but he couldn't afford to pay for it.

Mulanje Mission Hospital was there to help. The hospital had established a program to provide orphans and vulnerable children, as well as their caregivers, with health, livelihoods and education support.

Innocent joined the program, and since then, the hospital has been supporting him in his studies. His dream is to study Water Resource Management and Development, and with the help of PWS&D and Mulanje Mission Hospital, that dream is within reach.

"I prayed to God to help me achieve my dreams, and I thank God for this wonderful opportunity. My plea to the hospital and donors is that they should continue supporting other vulnerable children. Thank you very much," he shares.

Thank you for faithfully responding to Christ's call to support those in need this Lenten season and throughout the year. PWS&D is working to provide children in Malawi with the tools they need to build a brighter future.

Gathering Prayer / the Lord's Prayer / Words of Hope (1 Peter 3: 18)

¹ Written by the Rev. John Bannerman (PWS&D Committee Co-Convener)

Creator God, you are present here and everywhere. Shine your revealing light on our gathering this day that we might see you in the faces that surround us. Spread your sheltering wings over our gathering that we might feel your presence among us. Breathe your empowering spirit into our gathering that we might hear you speak in word and song.

Ever-present God, we come before you seeking forgiveness. In the silence we confess with our whole hearts...

Too often, when we should turn to you in our need we turn away. Too often, when we should reach out to others in their need, we walk away. Too often, when we feel that what we have to give is not good enough, we hide it away.

Forgive us our neglect, O God. Open our hearts to receive your saving love, through Jesus who encourages us to join our voices in prayer... ***Our Father, who art in heaven – hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come – thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen***

God hears our call; God knows what is in our heart – *For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. We are forgiven – thanks be to God!*

□ ***Be still for the presence of the Lord***

Prayer for Understanding

God of wisdom, send your Spirit to prepare our hearts and minds to hear your Word. Teach us to see you more clearly and love you more deeply as we follow Jesus, your Living Word. Amen

Scripture **Genesis 9: 8-17 [OT 7]**

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall

never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.”

God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

Psalm 25: 1-10 responsive/displayed

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

O my God, in you I trust;

do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me.

Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;

let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

Make me to know your ways, O Lord;

teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth, and teach me,

for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.

Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;

according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord!

Good and upright is the Lord;

therefore the Lord instructs sinners in the way,

leads the humble in what is right, and teaches them the way they should go.

All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep God's covenant and decrees.

1 Peter 3: 18-22 [NT 234]

For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.

And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you – not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

Mark 1: 9-15 [NT 34]

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message

Lent is a time of spiritual decluttering and creative transformation. A time of deepening our spirits and challenging everything that stands in the way of experiencing and sharing God’s abundant life. During Lent, we prune the branches of busyness and consumerism so that light can shine through. We smash the idols of incivility, privilege, and nationalism that stand in the way of authentic worship and service. We let go what keeps us from experiencing God’s presence in our lives. We awaken to God’s new possibilities for us and our communities.

During Lent, we need to repent – turn around – move from behaviours that are no longer life giving to actions and attitudes that promote flourishing. Things like materialism and consumerism, complacency, apathy, racism, xenophobia, homophobia, bad manners, and fear of otherness all need to be turned away from. We need to see ourselves clearly and honestly – turning instead toward justice and embodying God’s grace-filled vision for all creation.

The Gospel of Mark can help us come into Lent with our eyes and hearts open to the spirit moving in and around us to support needed change – to lead us to hoped-for rebirth – to startle us into leaning more fully into the abundant life God calls us to.

Mark begins Jesus' public ministry with a bang. Jesus appears from out of nowhere, is baptized, is tempted in the desert, and then begins preaching – and it all takes place in the span of only about 6 or 7 verses! This passage seems to be a good reminder that Jesus came not only to announce the good news that the kingdom was near but also to do battle with the forces of chaos that have been seeking to unravel God's cosmos ever since sin came onto the scene. It is a good Lenten reminder that in imitation of Jesus, we also should feel the Spirit leading us into places of great brokenness, chaos, and hurt. Where else is Jesus' healing touch needed more?

Lent has a lot to do with brokenness, chaos and hurt – it takes us into the wilderness for a while.

“The wilderness is a dangerous place. You only go there if you have to.” I think these are phrases used in Children and Worship – phrases spoken to help young children understand. As they run their fingers through the large, wooden sandbox, children are invited to picture the scorched landscapes Biblical characters encountered as they sought to follow God. Fierce heat, jagged rocks, wild animals, blistered feet.

This week's lectionary reading is about a long and treacherous stint in the wilderness, and I think Mark could have opened this account of Jesus' temptation with those same lines: *“The wilderness is a dangerous place. You only go there if you have to.”*

The author of Mark's Gospel, with almost shocking brevity, relates three major events: Jesus' baptism, temptation in the desert and first preaching in Galilee. The sequence of events is significant, not simply because it seems the natural order of things, but because in a new exodus Jesus recapitulates the journey of Israel: baptism (in the experience of the Red Sea), struggles in the desert (40 years wandering in the wilderness) and good news (entry into the Promised Land). In a similar move, Paul drew a parallel between the Corinthian church's experience of baptism, table fellowship and temptations, and Israel's baptism in the sea, sharing of God-given food and drink, and temptations in the desert. The texts and the experiences of God's people unfold layer upon layer...

Baptism is our response to God's initiative, our reply to God's gift. Through baptism we accept who we are – named as beloved and invited into a new life. Because of baptism – because we know and affirm that we belong to God – we can face desert testing with the confidence that God is with us always.

Jesus comes to be baptized out of obedience to God and in solidarity with all humanity. In this act, Jesus enters into the common circumstance of lost humanity – he identifies with sinners and outcasts of this world. He is baptized, because that is what God desires – God claims and names Jesus in this act of baptism – establishes his true identity.

Similarly, when we are baptized our true identity is established. We celebrate the gift of belonging to God. We respond to God's divine activity in our lives and in our world. We participate in the right relationship with God made possible in Jesus. We become who God's says we are – *children of God*. Remember your baptism and give thanks.

Remember also Jesus' temptation in the desert. Moments after he was baptized – as soon he was named God's beloved, Jesus was sent – driven – by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted. There are no details concerning the experience in Mark's account – nothing about hunger or fasting, nothing about the nature of the struggle or its outcome. All we know here is that the Spirit drove him in to the wilderness – he was there forty days – tempted by Satan – and that there were both wild beasts and angels with him.

This leaves me buzzing with questions! How exactly did Jesus spend his time? Was he tempted 24/7? Did he walk for miles each day, or camp out in one spot? Where did he sleep? What was the silence like, hour after hour after hour? Did he break it up by humming, laughing, or shouting? Did he star gaze? Play with birds? Chase lizards? As the days stretched on and on, did he fear for his life? Question his sanity? Wish to die?

Mark doesn't say – leaves all these questions unanswered. We know that Jesus didn't choose the wilderness. We know it was a long struggle. We know there were angels. Let's focus on that.

Jesus didn't meander into the wilderness – remember, *you only go there if you must*. And strangely this is kind of a comforting detail because it's true of my own experience and I am guessing it rings true for you. We don't choose to enter the wilderness – don't generally volunteer for pain, loss, danger, or terror. But the wilderness happens, anyway. Maybe it comes in the guise of a hospital waiting room, a thorny relationship, a troubled child, a sudden death, a fall or a stroke or a crippling panic attack. The wilderness appears, unbidden and unwelcome, at our doorsteps.

And maybe we need this wilderness time to experience the crisis induced by a sense of God's absence. Wilderness is a place of hostile forces, a place of despair and menace. Our wilderness may be that of addiction and substance abuse – it may be a jungle of depression and despair. Perhaps our wilderness is an economic wasteland

that reflects financial disarray and capitalizes on fear or anxiety. Our wilderness may be one of grief and pain, of illness and chronic health struggles. Wilderness takes many forms.

God does not will bad things to happen to us – does not want or cause us to suffer. I know that some would teach that, but I don't buy it. Sometimes our journey with God includes dark and desolate places. Not because God takes pleasure in our pain, but because we live in a fragile, broken world that includes deserts, and because God's modus operandi is to take the things of death, and wring from them resurrection.

Jesus' forty days in the wilderness parallel Israel's forty years in the wilderness, Moses' forty days on Sinai, and Elijah's forty day trip to Horeb. This biblical image of wilderness – of desert – is key to our spiritual maturity. We are meant to take these forty days of Lent and to imitate the experience of Jesus – to metaphorically spend our own time in the wilderness. It is what we commemorate – what will hopefully provide us with an opportunity to reflect on what draws us away from God – and how we can turn around.

But really? Forty days? That is a long time! I get the sense from Mark's gospel that Jesus strove and wrestled – that he experienced each day as a battle of mind, spirit, and body. Maybe the hours stretched into years, and the nights felt endless. For those of us who like things resolved quickly, this aspect of the wilderness can be especially trying, because we both tire and despair easily. Why, we ask, is this pain not ending? Why are our prayers going unanswered? Where is God?

At his baptism, Jesus heard the absolute truth about who he was. That was the easy part. The much harder part came in the wilderness when he had to face down every vicious assault on that truth. When the memory of God's voice from heaven faded, and he had to learn how to be God's beloved in a lonely wasteland. Maybe we, like Jesus, need long stints in the wilderness to learn what it really means to be God's beloved. Learning to trust it takes time.

Thank God for the angels! In that long dark time with Satan haranguing and wild beast circling it is a comfort to know that the angels were there. Jesus was driven out into difficult days and places. He was tempted and was with the wild beasts. The angels waited on him. Jesus was not alone. Somehow, somewhere, help comes. Rest comes. Solace comes. Our angels don't always appear in the forms we might prefer, but they come.

I wonder what Jesus's angels looked like. Did they manifest as winged creatures from heaven? As comforting breezes across the sun-scorched hills? As a trickle of water for

his parched throat? As a rock to lay his head upon? As the swirl of constellations on a clear, cloudless night?

What do your angels look like? What have they looked like in the past? What would it be like to enter into someone else's barren desert and become an angel for their journey?

According to Mark, Jesus came out of the wilderness and entered public ministry. So I am confident that we, too, can enter places of great brokenness, chaos, and hurt emerging ready to serve as angels for those in need. Jesus is with us in our wilderness sojourn, and Jesus is with us as we work to be a part of the world's healing.

I pray that we'll walk with courage into the deserts we can't choose or avoid. I pray that our long stints in the wilderness will teach us who we really are. And I pray that when angels in all their sweet and secret guises whisper "beloved" into our ears, we will listen, and believe them. **Amen**

□ *We lay our broken world in sorrow at your feet* 202

Offering and Prayer

The season of Lent takes us on a journey with Jesus to prepare us for the day he gave his life for our sake. Consider what he has given as you offer your gifts to God in his name.

At this time, we will also receive the scraps of alleluias you have brought to tuck away until the joy of Easter releases them again.

□ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow* 306

God of courage and compassion, we bring our offerings in Jesus' name. The world badly needs both his courage and compassion. Bless our gifts so that they might bring hope to others in these challenging times. Amen

□ *Unto thee, O Lord*

† Pastoral Prayers

As we enter this holy season, O God, we give thanks for your promise of new life that sustains us – encouraging us when news is difficult.

We thank you for tiny signs of hope, even in a bleak landscape or on challenging day – for glimpses of beauty in a smile or a ray of sunshine – for the people who support others in times of difficulty – for the chance to recover from mistakes and begin again...

Lord of life, sustain us with your presence – give us patience and perseverance as we await the future with you.

Trusting your promise of new life, it is with hope that we pray for anyone we have hurt by harsh words or careless deeds...

for those known to us who are carrying heavy burdens...

for those we work and play with...

for all who are seeking employment or worry about their businesses...

for troubled places in our world and those working for reconciliation and understanding...

for churches seeking new ways to minister in changing times...

for all those on our hearts this day...

Renew our hope for the future you will bring us and our desire to live out the courage and compassion of Jesus, the Christ. Amen

□ *Draw the circle wide*

More Voices 145

Blessing

Find your way in the wilderness of yearning. Learn to hear God's voice whispering in the everyday. Seek the saving wholeness of Jesus with hearts open to possibility. And may the grace of Christ, the love of God and the nurturing community of the Holy Spirit embrace us all. Amen

□ *Bless the Lord*

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