

March 11, 2018
John 3:14-21

Lent 4
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Crisis in the Wilderness

I'm often amazed at how our church year, our continuous retelling and reliving of the gospel story, seems to parallel so well with what's actually happening in our lives.

It's mysterious in a way for sure, but more so I think it's very telling of the inherent truth, and the ongoing relevance of our gospel message for today.

For here we are on the 4th Sunday of Lent, in the season of Lent. And what is Lent but the time of our year that we are called to reflect on the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness being tempted by Satan and ministered to by angels.

And so it is, that this time in our life together as the church, is also, as the gospel reveals it, a wilderness time.

And like Jesus, it's very important that we come to understand sooner than later, that while there are always angels ministering to us, there are also voices in the wilderness that would seek to condemn us; to overwhelm us, and disorient us, to mislead us away from the truth.

It is a voice that is constantly trying to draw our attention away from the love and the light of Christ, and onto our brokenness, and the brokenness all around us.

And perhaps we live in a world worthy of condemnation. A world of polluted waters, deforestation, and global warming. Precarious employment and a growing chasm between the rich and the poor. Feelings of mistrust and disconnection from one generation to the next.

We've nurtured a culture of psychological isolation and social alienation, there are chronic levels of anxiety and increasingly dysfunctional families, addictive lifestyles and demeaning forms of entertainment.

There has been a breakdown in our religious and social institutions, we subscribe to manipulative media, fake news, and corrupted democracies.

It is a voice constantly screaming into our ear that that the world is condemned, and we are powerless to do anything about it.

And certainly, there is truth to the condition just described, we have some very big problems.

But like any great liar, this voice that seeks to condemn us, does not wield the truth for the sake of good, but as a hook, as a half truth used to snare us, to turn our heads, to draw us away from the whole truth, the real truth, about who we are, and who God has made us, for the sake of our broken world, to be.

For, the world is not condemned. The world is not condemned.

Because the whole truth is this, and we speak what we know and testify to what we have seen: that God loves the world.

And we are convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

For as the gospel tells us, God so loved the world, that he gave to us his only Son; indeed, not to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

But, and there is a but, I didn't put it there, but as the gospel instructs us:

If we choose not to believe that God saves, if we chose not to believe in the name of Jesus, the name that means literally God saves, if we chose not to believe that that God so loves this world, that he has given to us his only Son, to empower us, to enlighten us, and to love through us, and to save us.

Then we are already condemned, because if we cannot believe that God will save us, then we have no choice but to save ourselves, and deep down we know we cannot. And so, through our disbelief in the grace of God, we condemn ourselves.

But this not our lot. For as the Apostle Paul assured us this morning in his letter to the church, "By the grace of God we have been saved.

And it's not a salvation for us to attain, or even something to hope for, but a present truth. Because we are God's children, and we have been given everything we need to become the people we are called to be.

A people created in Jesus Christ for good works, a way prepared by God before hand to be our way of life.

And yet we feel lost in the wilderness, putting one foot in front of the other, hoping and praying that God is somewhere in the midst of all this, that some how we will manage to find our way, manage to endure.

But this is not the way revealed to us by our Lord. Jesus did not endure the wilderness, he owned the wilderness, he claimed the wilderness as his own, as his Father's footstool, and he emerged anew.

Now it was no walk in the park, we know that. But Jesus recognized that even the wilderness was a gift of the Spirit, and a sacred time, and so he prayed more, and fasted, and he struggle with the question of who he really was, and who it was that God was calling him to be.

It was a time to decide how he was going to use the life he had been given, and to who's voice he would allow to define him, and to guide his path to Jerusalem.

And we know the path he chose. A path that would lead to his cross. The path of self sacrifice and obedience to the will of God.

A difficult decision to be sure, but as Jesus tells us, "this is the judgement (and the word here he uses in Greek is Krisis. This is the Krisis, he tells us, this is the need for decision, the need for judgement), that light has come into the world, and people have loved the darkness more than light" (John 3: 20-21).

And so, the judgement is ours too, the krisis is ours. Not as a time to be endured, but a time for prayer and a time for decision about the voice that we will allow to define us, and to be our guide.

Will we heed the voice of our adversary, the voice of hopelessness, defeat, and powerlessness? Or will we turn to the one who comes as a light into our darkness of our lives, wanting only to love, save, and guide us through?

We are not blind, nor are we naïve, we are well aware that the wilderness can be a dark and disorienting place, that our daily lives can be a dark and disorienting place.

But we are not alone here, and by the grace of God we have been given a Saviour, and a light to guide our way.

We have been freed from condemnation by the assurance of God's love and the promise of our salvation through Jesus Christ.

So, let us respond today, let us respond by turning our lives to him, or back to him.

By responding to the voice that calls us to walk along side him each and every day, to share our worries and our joys with him, to speak with him, to go out of our way to hear his word, and above all to place our trust in him, our faith in him.

For God so loved the world that he sent his only Son, so that all who believe in his name may have eternal life. Amen.