

Forty days and forty nights Jesus wandered in the wilderness. Forty days following his baptism, the life changing moment when John the Baptist, and perhaps the crowds, heard a voice from the clouds speaking "you are my Son, the Beloved" Jesus left the river. He traveled to lonely places called "wilderness" to pray. In a long tradition of prophets, especially Moses who brought the gift of the commandments to the people, Jesus sets aside time and place to be alone with God.

Today as we begin Lent, I wonder if we can set aside a bit of time for 40 days to pray, read scripture or literature that inspires us, meditate quietly alone or with others to listen to the Holy Spirit in whatever way that presence comes to us in a new routine. Can we give 40 minutes on one day or 40 minutes on two days or...that contains the expectation that God desires us to know that indeed we are not alone and beloved. Can we listen and discern how we are being called into action?

One way of thinking about the temptation in the desert is not to imagine that Jesus is being tested as much as Jesus has known the temptations of our own lives. In the Baptismal prayers we pray that "we renounce the evil forces that rebel against God" and the "the powers and principalities" that we might think can bring down evil and corruption around us--but it is only God's Love that can do this.

Can we remember that God enters into the little things in our lives that are distractions from the path we are walking? Distractions are empty promises that will not keep us safe or fill us with joy--but lead us into isolation and emptiness. The Scriptures points us to the power of God in our lives. Jesus at this moment neither leads the people with political power, nor feeds the hungry with power, rather when the moment comes, he shares a basket of bread given to him by a child and then gives the bread to others and it is more than enough to feed all the people. It is God's own self that fills our longing and gives us bread that is shared.

This Lent as we reflect on our own distractions, listen to the Word, and "turn our face" toward the One who is compassionate and full of grace, judging in order for us to see truth in our ourselves and in our communities, may we focus on how this turning allows us to step into action. Jesus left the wilderness and then began his ministry of teaching and healing. And all the while he took time out to pray, often in the lonely quiet places around him.

May we find our hearts praying always, that we have compassion for the vulnerable, and believe that God working in us can do more than we can ask or imagine. May miracles that feed the people, calm the seas, and heal the sick and create a beloved community be part of our journey.

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