

LENT 1

READING:

9 One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. 10 As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice from heaven said, "You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy."

12 The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness, 13 where he was tempted by Satan for forty days. He was out among the wild animals, and angels took care of him.

14 Later on, after John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached God's Good News. 15 "The time promised by God has come at last!" he announced. "The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!"

Mark 1:9-12

REFLECTION:

Mark doesn't waste any time getting to the beginning of Jesus' ministry. And it starts with a baptism. Matthew and Luke give a bit more detail into this event. John the Baptist is living it out his calling, proclaiming that the Messiah has come. The prophets had gone silent on the subject for hundreds of years and it's as if John is waking them all up from their slumber. "He's here; this is who we've been waiting for!" People are listening, awakening, and coming to the Jordan to be baptised, cleansed, in preparation for the coming Messiah, the sacrificial Lamb. And so Jesus goes to get in line himself.

When Jesus' turn finally comes, it's as if John does a double take. In Matthew's account, John tries to deter him. "Wait a minute, Jesus. You should be baptizing me! This is backwards!" Jesus' response is so simple, "Just let it be for now. We both know every part of the story needs to be completed. I am standing here clothed in full humanity, just as are these people who've come to be baptised....do this for me, my friend." And so John does. As Jesus comes out of the water from that simple act of obedience, heaven opens up and God let's loose his love for his son - "you bring me great joy! I LOVE you, my dear boy!"

This is the starting point of Jesus' earthly ministry. What happens next is strange and odd. Rather than naming his disciples, and hitting the ground running with all the good feels following his baptism, (also knowing that the clock was literally ticking) he goes to the wilderness for almost six weeks...him, the devil, wild animals, and angels.

Why begin the greatest ministry in history with redundancy and absence? Why not skip the baptismal queue? He was perfect and therefore did not technically need to be cleansed. Why not pass over the 40 days of temptation and emptiness? He was fully God after all too; perfect and all powerful.

In that line-up, he wore the fullness of his humanity. He stood shoulder to shoulder with those weary souls who had trekked out to the Jordan to be baptised. From the very beginning of his ministry, he mingled with those who acknowledged and recognized their

deep need to be reconciled with their Father...those who know they need saving, who can't possibly do it on their own - the desperately lonely, the abandoned, the addicted, the hopeless, the overwhelmed, the empty. And it starts with a cleansing. "I am here for those who are in need of a doctor; not those who are well".

Why the desert? I don't know for sure but perhaps it's so that we can know that even today, he stands shoulder to shoulder with us as we go through the desert. Before the empty tomb, Christ's life ended on a cross, charged as a criminal. The apostles and followers of Christ met horrendous persecution in life and horrible ends to their earthly lives. From my vantage point, they were either completely nuts or they had experienced something that had convinced them that in spite of the cost, it was more than worth it. And they faced it with a fortitude of faith shaped in the desert. Remember, before the desert came the baptism: the choice and the powerful affirmation which can carry us a long way...but not all the way. The desert is the stripping away of all the ways we've learned how to live life on our terms, to comfort ourselves, and buffet ourselves against loss and hardship. Perhaps then the desert is the grace period you get when you decide the pursuit of Christ is worth abandoning our own lives for. It's our 40 day trial period where we can go back to our old life if we want to. But it's the real deal - it paints a most accurate picture of what life as a Christ follower looks like - the devil, wild animals, angels - and Christ himself.

CHALLENGE:

Is life in Christ worth it? The baptism and affirmation are only step one and are where many of us stop and stay...perhaps for the rest of our lives. But is there something in the desert that makes it worthwhile? Is Christ himself enough for us?



PRAYER:

God, life is complex. It's difficult for any of us to be convinced that the mundane and the desert are where true life begins. We can't really imagine what would make it worth it all. Be merciful in our obstinance and lack of faith in your goodness and your deep, deep love for us. Help us to understand your character more and more so that we can come face to face with Christ, even if it means meeting him in the desert.