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February 25, 2007, Lent 1 C
Deuteronomy 26:5-11
Psalm 91
Romans 10:8-13
Luke 4:1-13

On the first Sunday of Lent every year, the Gospel story is one in which Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit is led in to the wilderness. There in the wilderness he is tempted by Satan. So, I began my preparation for this weeks sermon by thinking about the word: Wilderness.

By definition, a wilderness is :

- An unsettled, uncultivated region left in its natural condition,
- especially: A large wild tract of land covered with dense vegetation or forests.
- An extensive area, such as a desert or ocean, that is barren or empty;a waste.
- A piece of land set aside to grow wild.
- Something characterized by bewildering vastness, perilousness, or unchecked profusion:
- the wilderness of the city.

In the United States, there are 680 wilderness areas, covering nearly 106 million acres. The State of Michigan has 14 designated wilderness areas. Among these wilderness areas in Michigan are places whose names we recognize: Isle Royale, Seney and Mackinac, and some I have never heard of like The Delirium Wilderness, and Rock River Canyon Wilderness.

Perhaps for our Lenten observance we can travel to one of these wilderness areas for a 40 day pilgrimage. Wouldn't that be a wonderful way to spend Lent:

Join Jesus and the members of St. Andrew's for 40 days of February and March in the wilderness.

In fact, let's do it. I will put a sign up sheet in the back of the Church, we can begin signing up right after church. Of course, to prepare, people are going to want to know what they are to bring. That is a fair question. Well, What did Jesus take with him? Reading through the account in Luke's Gospel today I get the impression he did not take anything. He ate nothing, so obviously he did not take any food. And, if he forgot to take food, I suspect he did not take anything else. Maybe something to drink with, maybe not. So, if its really going to be a journey with Jesus I guess that means we need to leave behind our change of clothes, our toiletries, our check books, and our credit cards, our radios, our cell phones, our computers. I guess we will have to leave behind everything except the Holy Spirit.

Just how many people do you think will sign up. I suspect there is no reason to put the sign up sheet out. I suspect no one will sign up. . . At least no one in their right mind. . . And, if anyone is crazy enough to sign up, I do not want to go with them.

So, lets be a bit more realistic and ask just what then shall we do with the 40 days of Lent? What wilderness shall we enter? The wilderness that Lent invites us to enter is not a geographic place that you can find on a map. The wilderness is that place where we come face to face with our limitations, our weaknesses, our mortality and our emptiness. The wilderness is that place of chaos where we find ourselves lost, alone, confused, and unsure. The wilderness that Lent invites us to enter is the human heart. In the human heart are millions of acres of wilderness.

These wilderness areas have names, that many of us know: They carry the names of illness and diseases that effect the body, the mind and spirit. These wilderness areas carry the names divorce and seperation. They carry the names of job loss, demotion, bankruptcy and foreclosure. They carry the name of grief and of loneliness. They carry the name of abuse and addiction. They carry the name of betrayal and disappointment. They carry the name of violence and bigotry. They carry the name of fear, sadness, and emptiness. These wilderness areas carry the name of evil and sin.

On this first Sunday of Lent, Jesus invites us to enter into this most perilous wilderness. He invites us to go into that wilderness leaving aside those things we rely on for comfort. He invites us into that wilderness, because it is passing through the wilderness that we come to find our true heart. Passing through the wilderness we come to place in our heart where we find the presence of God. And when we find the presence of God, we find our true self. When we find our true self, we find the fullness of life.

To make this journey to travel through the wilderness to the presence of the living God alive in our hearts Jesus invites us to leave behind whatever is it that we turn to in our times of fear, loneliness, self doubt or emptiness. Just as Jesus left everything behind for his 40 day journey, so we are invited to leave all behind. We are invited to leave everything that we trust in, everything that we cling to, everything that gives us comfort.

What is your blanket that you cling to, what is it that you turn to that you trust will take away your pain. Is it eating and drinking? Is it buying and spending? Is it gossiping about others, ridiculing others, judging others---making others look small so you can feel tall. Is it something you watch--sports, or violence, or pornography. Do you turn to entertainment as an escape from facing a truth of your life? Is it the humm of the internet. Is it busyness that comforts you? If I fill my life with enough busyness I need not face my own loneliness and emptiness.

Like Jesus we will be tempted. We will be tempted to turn back on our journey. We will be tempted by that which is spectacular, by that which is powerful, by that which is quick and easy. But, with Jesus we can remain faithful, with Jesus we can keep our focus on the One who alone can give us that which we truly seek.

For your journey, Jesus invites you to take only the Word of God. Not the word of God that is a chapter or verse of the Bible, but the word of God that is Jesus himself. Jesus is the living Word that is near you. He is the living word that lives in your heart. Jesus is the living word that has power to withstand all the temptations that assault you. He is the living word that drive those demons from your heart. He is the living word that can free your heart, the living word that can save your life.

So my friends, let us go to the wilderness and share with Jesus these 40 days of Lent. At first, the wilderness of Lent may seem barren and lifeless. It may feel lonely and empty. But, the power of Jesus can lead us from that which is barren and lifeless into a place that is covered by rich, dense forests and gardens filled with lush vegetation. This Lent, let us go to the wilderness and there discover the fullness of our life.