

Sermons at Christ Church

Be a Joyful Gift to Others.

Lent I

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“Show me your ways, O Lord, and teach me your paths.” Prays the Psalmist. *“Lead me in your truth and teach me.”* The psalmist continues his prayer of trust in God. The desire of the psalmist was not to stray from God’s path but to be taught by God and to be led by God. The psalmist doesn’t say why, but the prayer is about one who doesn’t want to be in life’s wilderness all alone and clueless. The psalmist desires to count on God’s help, direction, guidance, and support.

I am often tempted to believe that without a wilderness experience, we won’t know how far we’ve gone astray, how empty and directionless we’ve become or the desire of God to always begin anew with us.

We have to believe that there is no other way that we can walk other than God’s way. There is no other path other than God’s path. There’s no one to lead us other than God. For if there was ever a path other than God’s path, that path wouldn’t lead us to where we need to be or where we need to go.

The psalmist’s prayer for God to show, teach and lead reflect an inner longing, not only of the psalmist but each one of us. We want to gain a deeper understanding of the path of God and how we ought to walk that path.

We want to be led by God as we go through the wilderness. We know we mess up. We are blinded by sin, become confused and even lose our way and the choices we make lead us on dark and perilous path.

A friend of mine shared a story about her son. He graduated from high school and earned a full scholarship to college. While in college, he found himself a girlfriend.

The kid who was on a path to becoming a pharmacist started skipping classes and spending time with the girl.

He found himself a job because he had to pay for all the different things that they had to do together. He eventually dropped out of college. But then something happened-the girl broke up with him. That was when he came to himself, and realized that he had wasted four years of his life in pursuit of nothing. He moved back home with the promise that he has set himself on a new path-a path of recovery and renewal. That was the boy's wilderness moment.

The gospel story reminds us that Jesus was led by the Spirit after his baptism into the wilderness where he was tempted by Satan.

The wilderness maybe a moment or a place of great vulnerability but Jesus was not in that wilderness all by himself, angels waited on him, he had help. So why do you want to go through your wilderness with no help? As if you can endure it by yourself. You and I need as much help as we can get.

Although there is nothing pleasant about the wilderness, it is precisely where we confront our own vulnerabilities. To be in the wilderness is to expose ourselves, it is the place where we come face-to-face with our brokenness and powerlessness. It is where we learn that we cannot depend on ourselves to take care of ourselves, we have to depend on God to break us, melt us, mold us and fill us.

In the wilderness we hear the cry of the psalmist echoing our helplessness and dependency on God. And it is by admitting our own helplessness that, someday, somehow, something new and wonderful begins to happen in our lives. We come to realize that it is God who makes our new beginnings possible.

The wilderness is where we begin to move in a new direction, committing ourselves to live fulfilling and meaningful lives. Our movement begins our process of discovery, a moment where we begin anew with God.

We hear the cry of repentance-the opportunity for a new beginning, a chance at a new covenant grounded in a plea which comes from the very bottom of each heart-we want to see God's path, we want to be led by God and we want to be taught by God.

The wilderness presents us with a choice, and the beauty of Lent is that it is a time when we have to consider whether we are willing to follow the example of Jesus in the wilderness or be consumed by the cares of the world and our inordinate desires.

If you have ever had a wilderness before, you would realize that it is the moment where you conclude that you cannot hold on to anything. That is when we learn to let go because we come to realize that there isn't much that we need in order to live fulfilling and meaningful lives.

It is one thing to accept and commit yourself to be led by God and it is another to open ourselves up to follow God's lead. When we accept and commit to be led by God, we don't miss our way, and even when we miss our way, God always shows us God's way and brings us back to where we need to be, just so God can begin anew with us.

Call it repentance, but my friend's son sought a new beginning with himself after his wilderness moment. You also may be going through your wilderness moment or may have gone through it. You may also have missed your way.

As harsh as the wilderness experience may have been, it is also a necessary place, for that is where we rediscover ourselves, the extent to which we have strayed from God's path and the path of renewal that is available to us.

In the Old Testament story we read of God establishing a covenant of renewal with Noah and all of creation. This was after God had destroyed the earth with water. The rainbow became the symbol of God's new covenant with Noah. Noah's story helps us to understand that God not only seeks a new beginning with us, BUT it is God who makes any new beginning possible.

There's no doubt that sin creates multiple paths for us and convinces us that all those different paths will somehow generate the satisfaction that we need. Sin burdens us, and we crumble under its

weight. To be free from this burden, the psalmist prays, show us your ways, lead us and teach us your way, the way of You!!

Like the psalmist, we also pray this prayer because we want God to show us God's way, we want to be taught by God and we want to be led by God. That is how we find true freedom and the true meaning of the life you have given us.

In Macbeth, Shakespeare writes of Macbeth hearing about the death of his wife. Macbeth cries out in agony "*Life is a story told by an idiot, full of noise and emotional disturbance but signifying nothing.*" This is the cry of a man in despair who thinks there is no meaning to life. This is a cry of a man going through life's wilderness and feelings helpless. Macbeth seeks meaning, he seeks answers and he seeks a new beginning. But it appears he is all alone and counting on himself.

Today is the first Sunday of Lent, Lent challenges this notion of meaninglessness and assures us that your life has meaning, that is why we want to know God's way, be led by God and be taught by God-so we can bring meaning to all our lives.

Lent is a time for asking difficult questions, why are we here? Why were you-especially you, created? We might not know but we can all agree that being in the wilderness often helps us re-center ourselves in the power of God. Lent is a period where we are confronted with the choice between good and evil, and admit our own complicity in the evils of the world, but we also make an attempt to solve those evils.

There's a story of a man who had accumulated so much wealth but was incredibly stingy. One day, he asked his wife to make him a promise, that when he passes, he would put \$50,000.00 in his casket. The wife promised to do just that. When the man passed away, the widow told her friend that her husband asked her to put \$50k in his casket and she plans to do that. The friend was quite amused by the story. Are you going to put \$50k in the casket? She asked. You bet I would.

During the viewing, there was this little box sitting by the side in the casket. No one knew what it was but the widow. Just before they closed the casket, the bemused friend accosted the widow and asked if she put the \$50k in the casket. Yes, I did. Where is it? It is in that little box. You mean you

are going to bury your husband with \$50k. The friend cried in disbelief. Yes, the widow responded. But don't worry, it is a check.

Lent ushers in the creative process of repentance-a way out of illusion into the place of newness and healing because of a change of heart. In this process of discovery we commit ourselves to rigorous honesty about our situation and condition as broken people.

Sometimes every moment of our lives feels like we are being tested, tempted or on trial. There's no telling what our wilderness moments will look like but we don't want to be alone and clueless.

Don't count on yourself, count on god's guidance, direction and help. Count on God to lead, teach and direct you to a new beginning. **Amen.**