



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Lent 1 (C)
March 6, 2022

RCL: Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Romans 10:8b-13; Luke 4:1-13

The liturgical season of Lent gives us both a *divine invitation* and a *map*. It embodies the first three elements of the Way of Love: **Turn. Learn. Pray**. A Lent done well sets us up to be able to **Worship, Bless, Go, and Rest** in a deeper fashion at season's end. In the early church, this was a time for preparing new converts to the faith.

What is the invitation? The invitation is to follow Jesus' lead by taking the 40-day Lenten journey to the wilderness of our own temptation. It is a time of year when we remember Jesus' model of claiming *exceptional time*. In this *exceptional time*, he followed the Spirit *into* the very place we usually try to avoid -- temptation. Usually, we pray, "Lead us *not* into temptation." In this season of Lenten exception, we follow Jesus as we spend intentional time facing truths about hard things. Temptations unchecked harm our communities, our sense of self, and our relationships with one another. In the words of the collect, we pray, "Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations."

What is the map? The map is a careful construct of created space and purpose. Jesus followed the Holy Spirit's lead. He went to the wilderness alone. He went for 40 days. We make a plan about place and time. We pull away. We set intentions. We remove from *play* anything that is not mission-critical. The goal is to close attention to the ways in which our hunger can lead us *away* from our relationship with God. As we learn, we take notes!

Jesus started his ministry, post-baptism in the River Jordan, by taking *first things first*. He pulled away at the Spirit's guiding, to a deserted place. It was neither comfortable nor familiar. Why? Perhaps intentional simplicity sharpens the senses. In a place of border with deprivation, we are vulnerable. In a place such as this, we are reminded that *comfort* is not always our friend. The Lenten discipline of *giving something up* is to help us. With a simpler routine, freer from ordinary distractions, Jesus models creating an exceptional context in which attention can be given to the process of **NOTICING** and **PRACTICING**.

Jesus was able to *notice* how the tempter manifested to him because he wasn't distracted. He was able to notice how the tempter used differing angles of manipulation: desire for comfort; desire for power; desire for favor. Jesus practiced *leaning in* to his love bridge to God—Holy Scripture. 12-step slogans function

much the same way. “Do the next right thing.” “One day at a time.” “Just for today.” These slogans lend a script to turn to in times when the mind isn’t quick enough to innovate a defense from an unhealthy urge. So too, Holy Scripture serves as a beacon light when we are floundering. Wilderness time helps us see how the tempter preys on us. It is interesting. Jesus prays on us. The enemy *preys* on us. They sound so similar--and yet are worlds apart. Time spent paying attention helps us know *what’s what* when life gets confusing.

Jesus modeled making space *before* he began his ministry. He needed to experience it while it was *all* he was focusing on. Later when he was busy in ministry, he could *remember* the map. Yoda sent Luke Skywalker to the cave on Dagobah to confront his *shadow* before he would be *tested* later in battle. Time in the wilderness gives us a chance to **practice**. Later, amid busy ministry, Jesus will be prepared. When Peter tries to tempt Jesus to avoid Jerusalem to protect his physical safety *over* following God’s direction, Jesus will grab the map notes out of his back pocket. He will reach back to that rich, wilderness time, and notice what is happening. This is a call for bread out of stones all over again! “Get thee behind me Satan.” Would Jesus have so easily recognized this, in a moment of active ministry, if he had not responded to the Spirit’s invitation to go away to prepare? An annual Lenten season of reflection and regular confession are good rules to live by.

For me, temptation can sneak up on me when I have not been paying attention to what was going on. I might have been smiling and going along, but then my body gives me some kind of signal, an early warning that the tempter is afoot. It could be a headache or an uneasy, pressured feeling in my chest. The tempter may use my need to please or my avoidance of conflict out of old childhood scripts. In Luke’s gospel, Jesus chose the identity “*tempted*” and not “*blessed*” as his first act of ministry. We in faith communities would do well to follow Jesus’ lead. We are indeed blessed. But I wonder how embracing “tempted” might have affected the church’s role in perpetuating white privilege in this country. I wonder how it might have affected the church’s role in the abuse of children. An annual Spiritual Inventory helps keep the people of God humble and the communities of God honest. Who is being kept from the table of God? Who among us is being oppressed or pushed to the margins? This invitation is for the health of our shared community and helps us all to live more fully the dream of God for our kin-dom.

Each Lent becomes an opportunity to come clean with ourselves and God. In this time, we can prepare ourselves for the ministry of the year ahead. I wonder how early in Epiphany we might need to start to really be ready to embrace this invitation. This is counter-cultural for us to carve out time to *refrain* from indulging ourselves. But God has important work for us to do. And if we are not on honest terms with the things hiding in our wilderness, ready to enslave and hijack our agency, we cannot play our part in the work of the kin-dom. God does not need Lent. We do. God already knows the myriad ways we have gotten off base. The point of this Lenten journey is not for God’s *divine edification*--but for our own. This is an invitation *and a map* to go face ourselves in the wilderness so we can really show up as Easter people.

At the end of Luke’s passage describing the temptation of Jesus, he adds the haunting phrase, “When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.” It isn’t just about Lent. Lent

gives us an opportunity to re-subscribe to our faith. Or, as those in 12-step might say, “Keep it green.” Even as we are doing this work in Lent to become especially clear with ourselves and clean with God, we are also having to be mindful that the work we are investing in needs to have a regular vehicle for activation. In 12-step, they say, “Keep coming back, it works when you work it.” We need not live in fear, but we do need to live in truth. The tempter/tester waits for opportune times. And when do the opportune times come? At *inopportune* times. When we are least prepared. When we have let our spiritual guard down. We need regular habits of *staying close*, like-- **Turn. Learn. Pray. Worship. Bless. Go. Rest.**

- What might your Lenten map look like in responding to the invitation to go away to wilderness? What *exceptional time* can you create for getting to know your temptations?
- What scriptures guide your actions when you are tempted?

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