

The Heart and the Wilderness

Scripture: Luke 4:1-13

4 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. 3 The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” 4 Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’” 5 Then the devil[a] led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And the devil[b] said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. 7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” 8 Jesus answered him, “It is written,

‘Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.’” 9 Then the devil[c] took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10 for it is written,

‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’¹¹ and

‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”

12 Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” 13 When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Today, the First Sunday of Lent, we enter into the lonesome valley. The wilderness with Jesus. We know what that looks like. Those who

have been working on COVID hospital wards know. Those living with addiction, or those that love them, know. The hungry, the displaced, know. Those losing toes to frostbite know. Those who are facing severe illness. Those who have lost loved ones. All know the wilderness.

Our sister, Bev is in the wilderness. That place between life and death

She said aloud: *I am here, see me.* Perhaps because of the essential loneliness of the valley, perhaps to ask the one who coming to meet her to take her home. All who have known and loved her know that she has known where her true home is for a long time.

The world has been driven into the wilderness these days accompanying the people of Ukraine. As bombing reduce homes and hospitals and schools and town squares to rubble. Our comfort becomes uncomfortable, our spring-like days while winter lingers there, feel unfair. We see trains of children sick with cancer on trains heading to the borders. Men standing in front of tanks. *See us, see our children, they cry. See us, see our struggle, they cry.* Some of you know the wilderness of war, firsthand. And war may seem to be out there, but we know it begins in here. It is within that the battle rages and there are choices that each mortal makes.

Jesus is led by the Spirit of God into the wilderness. He has no easy source of food or water, no companion to comfort and confide in. He is as vulnerable as any human ever was, and there he faces the voice of temptation.

This Son of God, this one with whom God is pleased, this one whom God would have us listen to. Let us lead him to another way, tempt him with power and glory – all the earth is yours. With ease – you

need not hunger or know hardship. With invulnerability – no fall will harm you. The people will listen to him and believe that is the righteous way. Jesus rejects that way, choosing instead community, humanity, vulnerability. Others, false messiahs, take it. Every land on earth has had them, including this one. Has had them. One who makes the deal, the strongman, who builds a kingdom of power without conscience the hoarder of wealth, who would deny others bread. The seemingly invulnerable - who from their fortresses make war on the meek of the earth. These false messiahs, these uncrowned kings proclaim that they are establishing a kingdom without equal and without end upon the earth. And they convince, or coerce others, sometimes millions to follow.

But they are leading people deeper into wilderness. Into the lands of jackals and ostriches. Making people strangers to their own conscience. Coaxing and coercing them to leave the home. That God has made in their heart. That place which is the kingdom of the Lord. The place that is our home, too, your home, too. There is a place that no bomb can touch. No illness can change, no loss can separate us. There is a place within us where we can know peace. Where we are whole. The place from which we can distinguish between. The false and true messiah. Where we continuously, even unconsciously seek God. And where we are continuously, even unconsciously. In God's presence. This land within us, this kingdom of God. This heartland is the holy land. And we know when people are living out of their heartland, people, ordinary people, just like us. Sacrificing their lives so that others may live. We see it in the mothers caring tenderly for children in hiding. Children bearing up with their parent's constant love and bringing them joy. We see it in the world taking to the streets. Stealing themselves for financial costs of protest. We see it in the embrace of persons at border crossings ready to take beloved strangers in.

We see the choice made for community, humanity, vulnerability.
Psalm 91 is cited in this story: You who live in the shelter of the Most High.
Who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord *My refuge and my fortress; my God in whom I trust.*

That refuge, that kingdom, that heartland, that everlasting love is right there, right here. Let us find our way home.