

Good For The Soul
First Sunday of Lent, 2021
Maple Grove UMC
Rev. Patricia Wagner

Mark 1: 9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved;^[a] with you I am well pleased.” ¹² And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. ¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news^[b] of God,^[c] ¹⁵ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;^[d] repent, and believe in the good news.”^[e]

*Wade in the water, we just heard Paisha sing,
God's gonna trouble it, Gonna stir it up and make it heal you like
the Spirit did in the waters at the pool of Bethsaida, by the
Sheep gate, where the one first into the troubled waters would
be healed. God was in those troubled waters.*

*Harriet Tubman sang that spiritual to those who were coming
along with her to freedom. It meant, go into the nearby waters
so those hunting you down lost track of you.*

*Wade in the water, children. God's gonna trouble the water,
gonna stir it up and heal you.*

*John invites everyone in the troubled city of Jerusalem to come
wilderness outside the city to enter the waters of the Jordan.*

It is good for your soul, says John, Confess, then enter the waters and see what God will do.

Jesus came to the Jordan. What he needed to confess, only he knew, then he ducked down into the waters troubled by God, heard within himself of his belovedness, and got sent out, into the desert, into that lonesome valley, by himself.

What temptations he found there, only he knows. Mark does not recount them in his gospel. They were private torments only you and I know fully how and when we've been tempted to be less than our true selves.

Only we know what we need to confess what we have done, and left undone, what griefs we carry, what brokenness burdens.

Only you know the wild beasts you've encountered who go by the "grief" or "cruelty" or "shame" or some other name.

Only you know what angels have waited upon you, as they did upon on Jesus; what healing came by their ministrations. And only you can bear witness to the wholeness that came out of that journey; the tearing and the mending.

I've been thinking about confession. The power of it, the work of it. And about mending. The power of it, the work of it. About how, together, they lead to us a new creation to our rising, our resurrection. That is the work of this season.

I asked our sister, Jeanette Belz, a master of cloth, to share her experience of quilting as mending work and healing work. (Jeanette shares this in a video)

We want these 40 days of Lent to be a time of confession and mending and rising for all of us.

We have new leaders for small groups where, for the season, you can talk about Jesus' healing stories, confess and mend together.

We have daily practices for you, which you can get in your email inbox Monday through Saturday.

We will be hearing messages from menders in downtown Atlanta, and from rural Indiana, and from the Ohio Reformatory for Women.

Each we will be mending this beautiful, broken vase created by the artist and teacher, D'Lyn Stinziano right here, before you, on Sunday mornings.

Because if ever we needed such a season of confession, for ourselves, for our nation, ravaged by disease and death, hate and violence, inequality and poverty, And if we ever needed to see and trust in God's power to mend us and mend through us and bring us to resurrection surely it is now.

I hope you will choose to be in this wilderness; all of us, together, confessing, mending, creating, rising. I believe, if we give ourselves over to is, to the troubled waters, to the 40 day journey it will be good for your soul and for mine. And for the communities we seek to build and heal. And I invite you now to join with me in a prayer of confession by the monk, Thomas Merton:

“My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore will I trust you always, though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.” Amen.

You are not alone:

Let us now sing our closing song:

We are a Wilderness, Wandering People by Jim Strathdee:

We are a wilderness, wandering people on a journey of the soul.
May we find our destination in our longing to be whole.
Our Holy God is calling to us. With Jesus by our side
May compassion be our compass; may the Spirit be our guide.

May we cherish all our children, let us heal our family's pain
Help us cure our city's madness, let love and justice reign.
Reconciled with one another in prayer and praise and song,
We're the body of Christ together and we know that we belong,
We belong, we belong, we belong.