

Worship Resources - "A Wild Ride"

1th Sunday in Lent, Year C,

6th March, 2022

Luke 8:4-15 NIV / Luke 4:1-13 NRSV

Prelude

Gospel Opening (Video) [Guide my Feet](#) **546**

Oasis Chorale posts and sings "Guide My Feet" at Faith Mennonite Church in Ontario, Canada, in July 2015. This song is available on our Healing River album www.oasischorale.org/recordings/healing-river/

Welcome Guests / Announcements

Pass the Peace

Opening Hymn – Praise to the Lord, the Almighty **37**

Call to Worship (responsive)

One: We enter this season of Lent, knowing the wilderness is ahead;

All: Prepare us, O God, to face whatever adversity may come.

One: We enter this week, uncertain of the distractions that might arrive;

All: Help us, O God, to keep our minds on You.

One: We enter this day, hoping to set our hearts on Christ;

All: Keep us, O God, to the way of faith.

One: We enter this time of worship, dependent upon our God;

**All: Show us, O God, Your way, Your truth, and Your life.
Amen.**

Invocation

Heavenly Father, your Son confronted the powers of darkness that obscure your compassion and love for all of creation: help us to use these days to grow in wisdom and prayer, so that we may witness to that saving love proclaimed in Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

First Scripture Reading – Luke 8:4-15 NIV

While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable:

“A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up.

Some fell on rocky ground, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture.

Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants.

Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.” When he said this, he called out, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”

His disciples asked him what this parable meant.

He said, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, “‘though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.’[a]

“This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God.

Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.

Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.

The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.

But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

A Time of Prayer

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

We will wait for you, O God. Your Spirit compels us to go into the wilderness, and we ask for the courage to examine the desert places in our hearts, and to be willing to face the adversaries in our lives— that which lures us away from being who you have created us to be.

We pray for the courage to face our wild beasts and fears. Relieve the troubles of our hearts, and the devastation of our distress. Turn your love towards us that we may know your grace in our loneliness and afflictions.

O God,
may the faith within us get out, onto our lips,
into our feet and hands, through our hearts.

May what we sing and pray here in this place, get past our inhibitions and into our actions this week.

May the passion for your Gospel burn within our hearts,
so that we cannot be silent in the face of deception or injustice.

If old-fashioned ways of sharing faith do not ring true to us,
then let us persist until we find ways to tell our story that reveal Your presence in our lives.

Help us, God, please help us
to just get it out, not arrogantly,
but as our humble confession
of what we believe.

We pray this prayer,
knowing that you watch over us, and deliver us.
We wait for you, O God.
In the name of our brother Jesus we pray,
Amen.

Gospel Reading Luke 4:1-13 NRSV

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness,

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.

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread."

Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

Then the devil^[a] led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.

And the devil 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.

If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."

Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

Then the devil 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,

for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,'

and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Message – "A Wild Ride"

So this morning we start our Lenten journey in the wilderness. The wilderness seems to play a big role in many stories in the bible, doesn't it? From the story of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, to the traveling stories of Abraham, this concept of the wild, strange places of the world playing a major role in the lives of the faithful is pretty consistent. One could even argue in the very beginning that Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden into the wilderness.

But what do we think of when we hear the word wilderness? Is it simply the wilder areas of the world outside of what we consider civilization? Those areas that haven't had major settlement by people, where the wild animals can be found, where there aren't many roads and conveniences. Places where we need to do a little planning before we go, since there aren't always convenience stores and supermarkets nearby, or cell signal and GPS covering every square inch.

Often we seek out this country because of its rugged, untouched beauty, for the sense of the hand of the creator at work in nature in its most raw forms. But that same beauty can also be scary and intimidating if we find ourselves suddenly without the comfort and security of those conveniences we've come to rely on. If the car should stop working, if we don't have GPS and are without a compass and map, or don't even know how to use those, if we don't have shelter, food, or water, we suddenly gain an appreciation for what the wilderness meant to our ancestors. For them, it was certainly a more scary place, a location fraught with the potential for suffering and harm, a place one did not want to be stuck in for very long. At the same time, though, it was often a place one could go to find true solitude, a place where there were no distractions, where fasting was certainly an easy practice.

It's here that we find Jesus in our gospel lesson this morning. Jesus has been baptized and recognized by the Almighty as God's son in whom God is well-pleased. Jesus has been named and illustrated by this divine gesture as the Messiah. Now he is led into the wilderness by the Spirit to fast and discover what being God's messiah really means.

Often when we think of fasting, it's in the context of denying or punishing ourselves. So often we hear people say, "they're giving this or that up for lent" and we think of that as denying ourselves something to observe lent. But that's not really what the traditional meaning of fasting has been. Certainly it is to go without food for a period of time, but not from the mindset to deny oneself, but to seek a meditative state with which to better focus one's spirituality and sense of connectedness to the Divine.

When one goes into the wilderness to fast, one goes away from all the external distractions that might otherwise keep us from focusing on our prayer and relationship with God. Part of those distractions can also include the need to cook and eat. When you go for a period of time without eating, it's actually been demonstrated that your mental acuity increases. You become more focused and less distracted. Modern medicine has actually discovered that chemical changes do occur in your body that devote more energy to your brain when you fast. So going and out to fast had benefits for contemplation and prayer focus. So Jesus is led to fast in the wilderness by the Spirit but as part of that 40 day retreat he also faces temptation. The temptation to take the easy road, the one without blood, sweat, and tears. To use his status and privilege to solve the ills and injustice that swirl around him.

The simple reading of this passage would have us making his trials in the wilderness just about personal temptation, about resisting greed, the thirst for power, and his own immediate hunger. However, the actual Greek word used here translates better as "testing" than "tempting." What Jesus is presented with by the Adversary are not the same sort of "temptations" in the sense we might imagine, like an extra piece of cake we don't need, etc. These are tests to see if even good things can lure Jesus away from the will of God, or lure believers into following a more comfortable messiah, one who makes things easier for them by wielding divine power to solve all their problems or better yet, one who works well within the powers of this world. The devil's challenges to Jesus are not to do bad things.

The first, to turn stone into a loaf of bread, would satisfy his hunger after the long fast. By

implication, if he can do that, he can also turn the abundant stones that cover Israel's landscape into ample food to feed the many hungry people in a land often wracked by famine. The challenge is to be a new Moses for the people. Jesus' reply draws on Moses himself by citing Deuteronomy 8:3. Bread is good, but not sufficient to define Jesus' mission.

The second test is offered in the devil's unofficial capacity as “ruler of this world” who can manage the governance of the world's kingdoms. For the price of “worshiping” or honoring that authority, the devil will hand it all to Jesus. Let's remember that most of the known world in Luke's day was under the heavy-handed control of Rome and its economic, administrative, and military empire. Surely a “regime change” can only be for the world's good! Yet again Jesus' answer is no. The price is too high, even to acknowledge the self-evident power of the devil in the political arena. Jesus' reply is again from Deuteronomy, 6:13, all authority belongs only to God. Implicitly, even playing the world's political games for a good purpose would be to risk serving something less than God. Something worth thinking about in today's political climate, with the “will of God” being thrown around so much in relation to political success.

The tests conclude with the last one in Jerusalem on the pinnacle of the Temple, the place where the presumably most righteous, the priests, carry out their work. Psalm 91:11-12 promises God's protection to those who are righteous, which the devil quotes to Jesus as he tempts him to test that promise. However, the very choice of location was flawed from the beginning if righteousness was a prerequisite. Many of those professionally righteous folks below were living out their role among Israel's elites by working hand in glove with the Roman occupiers, to the detriment of Israel's poor and suffering. Surely reform is in order! The devil urges Jesus to throw himself down to be gloriously revealed through the responsive actions of angels and then he can straighten the place out. But again Jesus quotes Deuteronomy(6:16), “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” In Luke's account of Jesus' earthly ministry, the meaning of Jesus' baptism commission unfolds, recalling the three tests he has undergone. Though he refused to turn stones into bread, he does feed the hungry. Though he refused political power, the proclamation of the kin-dom of God's justice and peace was the focus of his preaching and teaching. Though he refused to jump from the pinnacle of the temple to see if God would send angels to save him, he willingly submits to a worldly execution on the cross on Good Friday, confident that God's will for eternal life would result in an Easter Sunday. As we begin our own journeys of Lent with Jesus, remembering and celebrating this time of fasting and reflection with him, we will be walking through this time together by examining his parables, those stories he told with familiar characters and settings, but with unusual twists that often are difficult to make sense of, and stories we often go with the cliff notes version of, that makes easy sense and move on.

This week we're presented with the Parable of the Sower. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus speaks of how a sower went out to sow and some of the seeds fell on soil that didn't

nourish it, but others fell on good, fertile soil, and grew. We often read this parable and assume we want to be the good soil that holds fast and firm to the seed from God. But keeping to our wilderness perspective, what happens if we read the parable differently. What if, like Jesus, we are being called to go into the wilderness, where the soil is difficult for the seeds to take root. So often we read this parable as a reflection and indictment of personal spirituality, for example, how can I be more fertile soil for the gospel to grow in me, or we think what times in my life was I like the rocky or the thorny ground. Perhaps we need to shift our thinking from focusing on ourselves, and instead look to the needs of the wilderness around us and be present there.

In the past two years, we have found ourselves in an entirely different wilderness: One of pandemic and isolation, finding ourselves in surroundings that are unfamiliar and wild. Much like our pioneer forebears, we need to find ways to adapt to these new surroundings. Instead of focusing on our own soil, let us instead think of the soil we find around us in the wilderness with Jesus. Anyone who's done much gardening, or has been a farmer knows that some soil is better than others at growing certain crops. Some soil needs more work, more fertilizing and treatment to be productive. What care does the soil around us need?

As the church we've been so focused on our own garden we've lost sight of the struggles of the seeds God's scattered around us. Unfortunately our old soil is getting played out, and is losing its nourishment. We will be wandering together for the next six weeks of Lent, to see where God needs us to help things grow. With the theme of the wilderness, we know that things grow differently in the desert and wild places than they do in farmlands. If we pick up and try to plant what we know, it may not grow. Instead, we must pay attention to the wilderness we now find ourselves in, even when it's wild and unfamiliar, listen to the stories there, and find ways to help God's seeds to grow, in ways we might never have imagined possible. I hope you'll join in that journey and seek ways to find new life and new ministry in strange and unfamiliar territory. Amen.

A Call to Serve

Beloved Friends, *God wishes to be seen and wishes to be sought. God wishes to be awaited and to be trusted.* There are multitudes of individuals who long for God, who are seeking God, but do not know where or how to search. May this church, this congregation be a lamp to light the pathway for those who are seeking God. Our offerings—financial and other—help us to shine our collective light brightly so that fellow-seekers may find their way. Give, that we might shine more brightly.

A Time for Reflection - Musical Interlude

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

Benediction

God will continue to lead us out of the wilderness of oppression into the place of hope and healing. God will continue to teach us the way of repentance and forgiveness, if we are open to God's instruction. God's wisdom is with us: in the scriptures, the sages of old, the lessons from the past, and in our hope for the future, if we believe it, if we cling to it. Live into God's ways. Be slow to judge and quick to forgive. Know God's forgiveness in your life, and go forth to help repair and restore the world. You are forgiven, loved, and restored. Amen.