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First Sunday in Lent

2.18.2024

This morning we hear not of Luke and Matthew's account of Jesus' temptations in the wilderness, not of turning stones into bread or prospective angelic rescues from cliff diving. No, this morning, we get Mark's version that is all two sentences: "And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. " That's one. "He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him." That's two.

And as ever, I love me some Mark because of how curt he is. Because in Mark's two sentence journey through Jesus' forty days calls attention to each of our 40 days of Lenten wilderness and the meaning of those 40 days. In fact, Mark reminds us of the meaning of whatever wilderness periods we have in our lives. And reminds us that while we are encouraged to share that meaning we find, it is also ours and ours alone.

I keep reflecting on that fact, that we each make special meaning of our lives, because I keep thinking about people younger than myself, especially because a soft-lockdown that happened at OPRF high school last week as a result of shooter threats from a student.

I got a text from someone in the congregation letting me know it was happening and eventually was notified of the "all-clear" status of the school. Regardless of the fact that no one was physically harmed (as is my understanding), I couldn't help but think of the young people I've gotten to know over the years and their accounts of what living in a world of active shooter drills and real situations like this one is like.

If you read my reflection from last week (and it should be in your bulletin) I noted that the most serious thing that happened to ME when I was in school was there was a blackout that threw the school into panic and emergency mode which was soon discovered to have been caused by a squirrel who had bitten into a power line. Again, rest in peace little squirrel friend.

The idea that we live in a world where those who are now the same age as I was during the great squirrel catastrophe of 2003 instead deal with school shootings makes me so so angry. And sad. And defeated.

And I wonder if you have felt similarly when hearing news of school shootings. I wonder what you have felt when you have seen those you care for undergo hardship that you wish they would never have to face. Divorce, or death, or diagnosis, or any other sort of terrible thing that life can pit any of us against.

For better or worse, to see others struggle or endure hardship provokes in us a feeling for them.

And despite the intensity of those feelings we may have when we witness something like kids these days enduring school shooting training and the like, the Gospel today reminds us that these feelings are not necessarily others'. They are our own.

According to Mark, we can only imagine what Jesus endured in the wilderness those 40 days. We can only imagine what it was like to be tempted by the devil. We can imagine what it might be like, perhaps assume that he had nothing and faced hunger and cold and heat, we might assume that he felt alone and isolated or we might assume that he found communion with God as he was assisted by those angels who waited on him. We might even be right as we imagine what Jesus underwent.

But what Jesus discovered in his wilderness is only for him to truly know. And the same can be said of us. I imagine the fear, and anger, and grief that arises from something that happens like the

lockdown that happened at OPRF high school this past week. I suspect that those are feelings probably held by at least some of the students and faculty there that day. But what I do not know is how such experiences; how such wilderness moments will become part of the story of others.

I don't know I can ever say wholesale that the wilderness of growing up in America in 2024 or dealing with any hardship and loss is "good". The notion of redemptive suffering, the idea that the only way we get close to Jesus is through pain, that's not something I find particularly meaningful or true.

But what I do believe is that our God is one who created the earth out of something that was formless and void. I believe that Jesus is our example in part because of the ministry that came out of those 40 days of temptation in the wilderness. And just as I have faith in God and Christ, I have faith in the youth who face this world of school lockdowns and new hardships I could have never thought to have faced growing up. I have faith that in the mystery of the wilderness that is their lives, just as is the case for the mystery of each of our lives and, and more immediately the mystery of our Lenten journeys this year... I have faith that goodness will sprout forth.

And while I can be as boneheaded as Peter as he tries to learn from Jesus the good news that Mark notes Jesus began proclaiming as soon as he emerged from the wilderness, while I anticipate being foolish from time to time, I am so hungry for the wisdom of others. And not just from young people today. It is from each of you.

There is wisdom that shines forth from your goodness refracted through the hardships you face.

There are those at St. Christopher's who have spoken about the hardships of their housing and heating failing, of not knowing whether or not they can live pain free as they age and fear losing some physical ability. Heck, perhaps somewhat more silly, if you smell a particular fragrance in the basement, its because there was about half an inch of water that had been pouring from the boiler

between Mardi Gras and Ash Wednesday, My Lenten wilderness has already begun with calling on my guardian angels Mark Schneider as the senior warden and Marty Dunlavey as senior “knows how to not flood a church basement” guy and I have learned the power of having a repair company on speed dial.

What you learn and who you become as a result of the wilderness you face, that is for you and you alone to find out. Yet I hope that you will share what you find in your life, as it will make each of our own journeys all the richer. Amen.