

## HIS PASSION LED HIM INTO THE WILDERNESS 1 Lent C

On this first Sunday of our Lenten Journey God brings us into his School of Wilderness training. The scriptures give us reassurance that God is with us as we walk through our own Wilderness. There are obstacles in the path as we walk: certainly temptation, maybe lack of desire to be on this trip but at least we're moving in the right direction. The right direction is this journey toward a passionate life that leads us to the Passion for life of our Lord Jesus Christ. His Passion led Jesus into the Wilderness. It was unavoidable. It was this training ground that prepared him for the rest of his life.

Jesus is our Scoutmaster for this journey. For those of us from military backgrounds perhaps another term would be our Sergeant or Chief who looks after us and guides us to keep us safe. We may be reluctant unless we can take our pink slippers and our teddy bears, our food and especially snacks, a few tools, sleeping bag and a few books for good measure (hopefully a Bible). So let's get on with this journey.

The wilderness we should have no doubt is an actual place, a wasteland of sand, little vegetation, mountainous in some areas and easy to get lost in. I have visited this area in Israel twice and it's no wonder Jesus encountered the devil. It's being in a place where one is definitely lost. Starvation is likely and dehydration is a fact of life. Hallucinations are common place. It's a living hell!

Yet Jesus passion for life drives him on. He is reminded by today's Psalm 91 of God's promises that help him get through his wilderness journey.

"Because you have made the LORD your refuge and the Most High your habitation there shall no evil happen to you, neither shall any plague come near your dwelling." Psalm 91:9,10.

Another promise comes to mind as Jesus jousts with the devil on his journey concerning his safety, daring him to fall off the fifty foot wall of the Temple. "For he shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. They shall bear you in their hands, lest you dash your foot against a stone." Psalm 91:11,12.

Along the wilderness journey wild animals can be found and the Psalmist again speaks of God's protection in the next three verses.

We are in good hands along this journey with Jesus. He marks the trail, he feeds and nourishes our souls along the way and every encounter with the evil one is met with encouragement to keep going and not quit.

And when at last the wilderness testing is done a reward and blessing awaits us. In Deuteronomy the children of Israel enter the land of milk and honey. In the fifteenth verse of Psalm 91 God tells us, "I will rescue him and bring him to honor." In the Romans lesson, the last verse reads, "For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." And in the gospel of Luke, last verse of our lesson it reads, "When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time."

"Until the next time," we meet with the tempter may be disconcerting. The devil wants to disrupt our momentum on this journey toward a passionate life. He is good at it and he knows what to throw in our path to make us trip and fall. No one is immune from falling. We all know that very well. But there again we are reminded of our tools given to us for this wilderness trail. In Paul's letter to the Romans he says in effect it's not rocket science. Paul reminds us we are given by virtue of our baptism "the word of faith."

The "word of faith" makes us strong for the journey. It reassures us we have this Scoutmaster, this Sergeant or this Chief who has blazed the trail we are on. We need not memorize volumes and have been to some School of Martial Arts to know what to do when faced with trouble. Nor how to keep calm when the going gets tough. Seminary won't help you either. The "word is near you, on your lips and in your heart." You'll know what to do and what to say when the time of trial descends upon you. Look up and remember to confess the strong name of Jesus Christ. He earned his badge of courage. He beat the devil at his game!

"If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9. Are you thinking being saved has only to do with life after death? Look at the rest of today's scriptures. Remember the milk and honey? Remember that the devil departed until next time? Sounds too simple? Why does it have to be so hard? We've heard

these scriptures all our lives. It's not magical if that's what your thinking.

Locking our lips and our hearts on Jesus as Lord of our lives means God has made a way for us to hold on, to hold fast to our faith. The journey is forty days and for sometimes it feels like a lifetime. Yet, like a flea on a dog, like a pit bull on human flesh, God points to Jesus as our Rock. And he is going to get to the end of his journey toward a Passion-filled life. He wants us today to hold true to our calling as Christians, whether down steep cliffs, washed out roads, broken relationships, depression and addiction. Jesus is our Lord and he blazed the Way to the life we were meant for.

In France, they grow a lot of grapes, but in France they do not water the grapevines. California vintners use lots of irrigation, but not in France. The French believe that it's better to have a bad harvest one year than to lose vines due to drought. If you don't water your vines the roots of those vines go deep, deep, deep into the earth until they touch groundwater and become invulnerable to drought. The harvest may not be great one year but the vines will return the next year.

When we make the promises that structure our lives, when we say I believe, I do, Amen, we sink the roots of our faith deeper and deeper, so deep that these roots of our faith can handle our failures. We don't know what kind of harsh weather our lives will face; we don't know the twists and turns our hearts will take. We make promises; we stake our lives on promises confident in the deep, eternal well of God's faithfulness. We send our roots deep into the waters of life with God. In God we find our hope, our promised land and the words of eternal life. Where else would we ever want to go?

Your faith on this journey toward the passionate life will grow. Hold on! It will get better. Seek the Lord while he wills to be found; call upon him when he draws near. AMEN