

“Driven Into the Midst”
B, Lent One; Mark 1:9-15
February 18, 2018; 10:00 am
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

I. SEVEN VITAL VERSES

Mark 1:9-15 The Message (MSG)

⁹⁻¹¹ At this time, Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. The moment he came out of the water, he saw the sky split open and God’s Spirit, looking like a dove, come down on him. Along with the Spirit, a voice: “You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life.”

God’s Kingdom Is Here

¹²⁻¹³ At once, this same Spirit pushed Jesus out into the wild. For forty wilderness days and nights he was tested by Satan. Wild animals were his companions, and angels took care of him.

¹⁴⁻¹⁵ After John was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee preaching the Message of God: “Time’s up! God’s kingdom is here. Change your life and believe the Message.”

II. A MOVING STORY

It all happens so fast! This business of living. Our days on this planet. This journey we travel in the life of

faith. *Not* just on the calendar –for that certainly happens fast. How the *heck* did we get to Lent already?! I haven’t put the Christmas wrappings and music away yet! Have you?

But there is an *urgency* to our travel—even in *kairos* time. For God is a God on the move; the Spirit stirs and nudges at times—maybe to get us “woke” and started, but then blows and swirls and compels, till we are swept up in it—moving and swirling ourselves.

Hear this good news again from the Gospel of Mark—all in the first chapter; all in seven vital verses. (read)

That’s it! Things are *happening*, and they are *moving*. No time to dally around and ask questions, ponder the meaning, even engage in dialogue—with The Satan in the Wilderness or anybody else!

Matthew and Luke, when *they* tell these chapters in Jesus’ journey, give detailed and rich descriptions of Jesus’ baptism, his temptation, and the beginning of his ministry. Remember all the detailed accounts of Jesus being tempted to claim the power, eat the bread, drink the Kool aid? And, then, how he refutes the compelling forces by the equally-compelling power of scripture?

Not here. Mark, as we have seen before in this season, uses what we call a Dagnet-like style – “Just the facts, Ma’am, just the facts.” But, in our lives, as with Jesus, it may not be *just* about literary style at all. For it does all happen so fast! And, all at once in God’s *kairos* time. For baptism, wilderness, trial,

testing and calling are all bound up together. Inexorably linked in our lives and the living of our own chapters.

For, we are *driven*, too. Driven up *out* of the waters into new life—*our* new life—*our* unique calling. With Jesus. When we speak of “walking the Lenten Journey with Jesus”, it’s not just a pretend drama, where we put ourselves back in history and imagine sauntering along beside Jesus on that “Lonesome Valley Road.” Not pretend at all. For this is *our* journey. Too, also, with.

We are named and claimed and blessed by God at our baptism, and many times along the way. And then, we are driven into the wilderness—the tough times, the trials and temptations of life, and then back out again into a new place in the journey—the place of our calling and purpose—more clearly refined and defined.

And it all happens so fast—when you think about it.

III. DRIVEN

Yet, to be “driven” is *not* just about urgency and immediacy—as Jesus was driven into the Wilderness by the Spirit. And it’s not to be confused with the unfaithful notion that “God brings us bad things in life to test our faith.” It’s a *distinct* difference that must be bridged and explored at a deeper, more complex level.

Set aside for a time, that over-simplified notion of how God works in the world, and feel the power and energy of this movement.

¹²⁻¹³ At once, this same Spirit pushed Jesus out into the wild.

And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness.

At once the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness,

Ekballo—in Greek it means “casting out.” The same verb that was used when Jesus cast out the demons—exorcised them! Like the Israelites being cast into the Wilderness to wander—this is not a gentle nudge! It’s a forced wilderness retreat and season of discernment. A period of testing. Jesus is “kicked out” into the wilderness.

Have you ever been there? Cast into a season of re-evaluating everything you’ve known and thought to be true? Driven to a new understanding of the way the world works? Forced to question and reconsider *everything*?

We are driven by many forces. Even when we think we’re not.

We are driven into the Wilderness, into tough scenes—sometimes by external forces, sometimes by compulsions within. We are driven to distraction when things seemingly beyond our control won’t let up and keep on with their pounding at our souls.

We are driven to our knees –by life, by circumstances, by the time we are at the end of our rope and finally resort to that best place of all—on our knees, praying to our Creator for help. Where we might have started from if we weren’t so sure of our own ability to make

everything work out. “I surrender all. On my knees. Take my life, and let it be.....”
We can be driven batty; driven insane; driven away, driven to tears.....

And we, like Jesus can be driven into the desert; the place of testing and trial; the place of hunger and thirst and feeling like it might just be easier to jump off the rock ledge.

IV. MINISTERED & CALLED

And once there—thank God and the angels—we are not *left* on that ledge. Not abandoned with no purpose.

Kate Robinson describes our “wilderness times” as a time of being like Jesus: “Wilderness is time of realizing that you are a being given the opportunity to prove what you know is true.

“This was not a time of spiritual failure, but of spiritual *opportunity*. You are no different than that young man -- you have all the same tools -- you are made in the image and likeness of God.

And no one chooses a ministry -- they are called. And the calling is often in the language of a wilderness experience.

David Lose reminds us that this passage on this pivotal day—the First Sunday in Lent—is realistic but also hopeful—*realistic*, because “life is filled by challenges, testing, moments of feeling overwhelmed, sobering news, and loss. But, we are not left without hope. “The Spirit present at Jesus’ baptism propels him into the

wilderness, but does not leave him unprepared or alone. “

“The Spirit does not drive him forth *until* he has received the affirmation of Baptism that he is God’s beloved Son, well pleasing to his Father, and recipient of the heavens-rending power of the Spirit. And he was not abandoned in his testing, but received the attentions of angels.”

“So also with us! We received in Baptism the affirmation and acceptance and promise of accompaniment from the God who created the heavens and the earth. What can we *not* accomplish? Of *course* we will be called to testing and challenge and suffering and growth – this world God loves *needs* our care and attention, our action and commitment, and God has called us to be part of the struggle as agents of love and protection!”

You see? We are *not* driven into the trials because God is facetious and wants to “test our meddle”, but because God *needs* us to enter the fray alongside the Spirit—to delve-into this hurting world of God’s beloved children.

And God does not ask *us* to do this alone, in any way, shape or form. The same Spirit that conveys God’s blessing and promises on us, “also drives us into a world desperate to hear of and experience God’s love and continues to tend us through angels we recognize and others that come to us at unawares.” (Lose)

V. MINISTERING ANGELS

So, when you are in the wilderness look around for those ministering angels.

They might be in places or characters you least expect.

My family and I have had some ministering angels lately—in the guise of lawyers, and insurance agents and scout leaders and pastor friends that used to be lawyers, andyou can come up with some examples, I'm sure!

You never know where they might show up. God works in mysterious ways! And don't be afraid to let them help. Even if they look like wild animals!

"He was among wild animals, and angels were ministering to him." Wild animals were his companions, and angels took care of him.

Animals were companions with the angels! What we fear and avoid might be our best companions.

Remember, as you're looking, that you might recognize those angels right off, but you might not. They might come to us unawares. That God's presence might be in this place and we do not know it.

VI. WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

When the going gets tough. When you're thrust into the Wilderness, capital W--that place of trial and testing—look *around* for the ministering angels, and also look *back*. Remember.

Remember your baptism. Remember how you were named and claimed, affirmed and given a new name: *Beloved*. Remind yourself who and Whose you are. Knitted together in your mother's womb by the God of all creation—made in the *image* and likeness of God! Remember that the life of faith is *not* avoidance or denial of the tough times or even death. You *will* go there. Jesus went there; the Israelites went there; we all go there on occasion.

VII. FASTING FROM FEAR:

And so, we launch fully into the Season of Lent. It's a tradition to fast during Lent—to give up something in order to focus more fully on our life in God. The Pope offers these thoughts to us for a new twist:

(Read the Pope's list below)

I would add one thing to that list, brought to us by the ministering angels in the Desert: Fast from fear. Angels most of all tell us **not to fear**. They are God's messengers and that is their Number One Message!

Let's covenant together this Lent to fast from fear!

Moderator Marge Erickson started us on this "No Fear Plan" with her article in the February newsletter:

“We have much to celebrate and be thankful for as we step forward to bring God’s dreams for our church alive in this coming New Year. What new opportunities await us, if we are faithful to listen to God’s voice? Will we overcome our fears? Will we open up to new opportunities?”

This partnership between God and the people of CUCC can have new and powerful meaning if we will engage the vision of building a love, supportive community—in the church, the larger community of Buena Vista, and the world beyond. Jesus has shown us that “Love is Still the Way!”

VIII. BABOOM! USE?

It all happens so fast, doesn’t it?

Jesus is led, driven, propelled into the wilderness right after his Baptism and heavenly affirmation by the Spirit. Baboom! In seven verses: Baptism, Wilderness, launch ministry—the Kingdom is among us! It doesn’t drag out but happens almost all at once.

We are blessed, affirmed, driven to the challenges and place of opportunity and testing and then, immediately launched into our own unique ministry and calling. Because the kingdom is *already* here, at hand, among us!

DO YOU WANT TO FAST THIS LENT?

In the words of Pope Francis

- Fast from hurting words and say kind words.
- Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude.
- Fast from anger and be filled with patience.
- Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope.
- Fast from worries and have trust in God.
- Fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity.
- Fast from pressures and be prayerful.
- Fast from bitterness and fill your hearts with joy.
- Fast from selfishness and be compassionate to others.
- Fast from grudges and be reconciled.
- Fast from words and be silent so you can listen.

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