

**Message**  
**February 20-21, 2010 – Lent I**  
**Romans 10:8B-13; Luke 4:1-13**  
**Worship and the Word**

Today, in Luke's gospel, we move from last week's story of the glory of Jesus revealed to us all brilliantly bright, on the mountaintop, to his lone journey, saddled with the power of the Holy Spirit into the vastness of the wilderness; what Luke's writer also calls, the "wilds, or a lonely place." Wilderness has many different looks. For some of us it may be the months and months of unemployment; or it may be the grief we suffer from the loss of one loved; or our isolation brought on by shame. Maybe our wilderness is a whirlwind of turmoil that simply disables us. For Jesus, his wilderness journeys sometimes include those closest to him, those who stand on the edge, waiting, lovingly serving as comfort. But, in today's wilderness story he's very much alone, protected by the power of the Holy Spirit and continually bombarded by his tempter, the devil. And Jesus is hungry, his resources are depleted, his judgment is challenged and the tempter doubts God's love for him. But Jesus teaches us that our wilderness places of contradiction and confusion are, at the same time places where God works miracles and healing begins.

Wilderness is what the church calls Lent, a season of 40 days where we take on disciplines and self-denials that draw us to focus on God as our only true source of well being. For Jesus his 40 days are times of testing. He emerges triumphantly with God's Spirit working in him and journeys right to the place most familiar to him, his place of worship and his faith community. You may have chosen your 40 days of Lenten discipline. Good for you. If not, consider this, think about worship as your Lenten discipline. We'll be gathering for worship every day. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, come at 8:15 for Morning Prayer. Come every week day evening at 5:30 for Evening Prayer. Join the staff on Tuesdays at 9:30 a.m. for Holy Eucharist and come every Wednesday morning for Holy Eucharist at 7:45 a.m. Also, each weekend throughout Lent, we'll be teaching/preaching on how worship can shape our week.

Worship is God's most sacred story for us; God speaking God's saving promise for us, bringing us new life, and fashioning us to serve as the purveyors of his kingdom. We respond to God's saving grace, with wonder, praise and thanksgiving, known as the Holy Eucharist. In our tradition, we refer to this worship as liturgy, which means the work of the people. Our Book of Common Prayer maps out for us what this liturgy looks like. It revolves around two main parts, The Word of God and the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion. In other words, our worship is a sign of what we believe, what we have faith in: that we are the very chosen people of God, made new and whole and resurrected in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ known to us the his holy meal, and that Christ is very present in our hearing, study and reading of Scripture as a sign that Christ is very present for us. Word and Table go hand in hand.

Today, I'd like to talk with you about the importance of Scripture in worship and how scripture is our sustainer, teacher, comforter and guide in our daily life.

In our liturgy, we follow the revised common lectionary, readings each week from the Psalter, the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Gospels that cover a three year period : A, with an emphasis on the gospel of Matthew, B with an emphasis on the

gospel of Mark and C with an emphasis on the gospel of Luke. John is covered on special occasions such as Holy Week. Digesting these assigned lectionary readings each week enables us to have a broad overview of the bible over a 3 year period. But, there's an added blessing. Over the years, I've had the privilege of traveling on mission to South America, Central America, Haiti, and Africa. Each trip involves worship, almost always with the Episcopal Church or a community connected with the Anglican Communion. Regardless of where we are on Sunday morning, and what language may be spoken, I know that when Luke 4:1-13 is read this morning, it's also read in all the worship communities across the globe who follow the lectionary. Knowing that millions of us are present in the same Word, in the same saving story of Christ in our lives, unites us even more, into the community of Christ, emphasizing not our differences, but rather our similarities, and for this I give thanks.

In the study of worship scholar Gregory Dix teaches that the Lord's Supper "week by week and month by month, on a hundred thousand successive Sundays, faithfully, unflinching, across all the parishes of Christendom, is what God does to make...holy the common people of God." I would suggest, that receiving the Word is also a sign of God making the common people of God holy. In other words, the Word, entrenched with the Lord's Supper, is a sacrament, an outward and visible sign of God's inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace. Let me define the Word as sacrament another way: Jesus is the unseen of God, God's saving love for us, made flesh and known to us in the Word. In the Word, he now calls us to be a living sign of God's saving power in the world.

Orthodox Jews do something called laying tefilin. The first five books of the bible are called the Pentateuch. In Hebrew these books are named the Torah. These tell the story of God's birth of the nation of Israel, and God's saving actions among God's people; and principles for a code of living, the Law, with the Ten Commandments, and other ways to conduct ourselves as the sacred people of God. The Torah so identifies God's people that it is carved not just in stone tablets but on our hearts as well, as the prophet Jeremiah tells us. So, it's fair to say that the Word of God is not just something we read. But, in fact, Scripture is the very core of who we are and how we live as God's own. Scripture is what dwells within us and calls us into practice. So, when orthodox Jews pray, they pull out a little box that contains bits of scripture, those parts of the Torah that tell us how to live. They strap the little box to their foreheads so the Word is what most occupies their minds. Streaming down from the box are long straps, thongs, bands called phylacteries affixed to their left arm, closest to their heart. Clutching their prayer book in their arm, they move in prayer to the rhythm of the Word rocking the Word back and forth from their minds to their hearts. In worship, we too invite the Word of God to live within us every time the gospel is read. Often when you see us announce the gospel, we make the sign of the cross on our forehead, on our lips and on our hearts. We're being invited to lay tefilin; that in listening to the Word of God it will live and reside within us, in our minds, on our lips and in our hearts. Scripture doesn't just rest in our hearts and minds; it directs, instructs and fortifies us.

Faced with temptations, wilderness times are conflicting. The tempter is very clever and offers to us those things that look very similar to what we need...See, somewhere along in life, we learned that maybe we just aren't good enough, not worthy. So we create for ourselves ways to show the world someone we're not. We give the

world an image that shows ability and confidence; all the while hiding our insecurities. But, in the wilderness, we're stripped of those cover ups. No more chocolate bars to buoy us up. No more television shows, computer screens and blackberry keypads to distract us from necessary conversations. No more cocktails to masquerade our fear. Seductive temptations are just a reach away, for us and for Jesus. They look good. They make sense. We've known success with the tempter's ploys. Then, Jesus reminds us what Scripture says. We don't bow down to the temptations. In our hunger, it's God's saving Word that feeds us. Our safety and security is in the one true God, and we worship only him; and we can trust in the power of God's undying, never failing love for us, no matter what. Armed in scripture, we emerge from the wilderness stronger, fiercer, fearless disciples for kingdom work.

The kingdom of temptation is so closely aligned with God's kingdom that, without the love of Christ written on our minds, spoken from our lips and encircling our hearts, we may not see the difference between the two kingdoms. Scripture tells us that the wilderness is not Godless. In fact, it's in the wilderness where we must depend on God; only God gets us sorted out with the gift of wellness, and strength. This is our God; the God we depend on when we've finally realized that all those little gods we've created for ourselves are not the wilderness warriors that will get us through.

Scripture tells us where we come from and whose we are. Scripture in the life of worship, one teacher explains is what "helps to create the sacred space in which the community comes to be in the presence of God...sacramental – a sign of God's reality among us" (Johnston, Michael. Engaging in the Word p. 149). Coupled with both scripture emblazoned on our hearts and the nourishment of the Lord's Supper, we are a community of grateful, thankful people. We don't sit on our hands. We go out, approaching the world with transformative work, making the Word alive. We are kingdom people called to practice our faith; not to leave it at the doorstep as we walk out of here.

So, this week, I imagine many of us are beginning our Lenten disciplines, our practices turning, and drawing closer to God. Some of us have already taken on the discipline of attending worship every day. My guess is, our day is just going to be better because we've been here, having been fed by the Word of God and his Holy meal in Jesus Christ. Worship is what equips us to weather the wilderness times, when the temptations are too great, when we're afraid we can't resist.

Early humanity understood itself as sacred, holy, outward signs of God's grace in all of life. Life was lived in response to God's very loving presence in our lives. Imagine if we just lived our every day as holy, sacred times when all that we do is an encounter with the divine?

Consider this Lenten discipline: get armed in scripture. Try praying Scripture. Pick a passage. This one is perfect, Luke 14:1-13. Read a bit, let it rest with you. Then, pray the message you receive. When you feel called, not necessarily having understood it all, just called to move on, read some more. Pray again. Continue bit by bit. Let the Word become a part of you, each day this week. See how Scripture is your refuge and your strength, a lamp unto your path in your routines this week and give thanks for how our words and actions, are his, and draw nearer to his generous love.