



Westminster Presbyterian Church
Eugene, Oregon
“At Home” Worship
February 21, 2021
First Sunday of Lent

Leading in Worship Today:
Ursula Damgaard, Director of Music
The Rev. Marta Z. Ukropina
Liturgist: Arlis Wozniak
Vocalists: Steve and Jeanie Halberg

Gathering Around God’s Word

Call to Worship

**Come to the Lord with openness,
seeking God’s presence whatever it brings.
Bring doubt, bring belief.
Seek the Lord and live.
Let us come together to worship God.**

Opening Hymn

Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days #166

Call to Confession

**Happy are those whose sin is forgiven, who no
longer suffer in silence, but name their sin and seek
God's grace. Let us confess our sin.**

Prayer of Confession

Holy and merciful God, in your presence we confess our failure to be what you created us to be. You alone know how often we have sinned in wandering from your ways, in wasting your gifts, in forgetting your love. Have mercy on us, we pray: cover us with your grace, feed us with the bread of life, and re-create us in your image; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Happy are those whose sin is forgiven! Be glad in the Lord and shout for joy: in Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

The Word

Prayer for Illumination

O Lord, may the words of your mouth be our daily bread, and may the leading of your Spirit become our way; in Jesus' name. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Old Testament Reading: Psalm 25:1-10

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
O my God, in you I trust;
do not let me be put to shame;
do not let my enemies exult over me.
Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

Make me to know your ways, O Lord;
teach me your paths.
Lead me in your truth, and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;

for you I wait all day long.

Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord!

Good and upright is the Lord;

therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

He leads the humble in what is right,

and teaches the humble his way.

All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,

for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

New Testament Reading: Mark 1:9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

Anthem

It is Well With My Soul

Sermon

“Believing is Doing”

The Rev. Marta Z Ukropina

Since David and I typically alternate who preaches week to week, the last sermon I delivered from this pulpit to a sanctuary full of people was on March 1, 2020. It was the first Sunday of Lent and the very early stages of the Coronavirus Pandemic. Churches had not yet cancelled, but we were already having discussions about what our response should be if we needed to close down for a few weeks. David and I gathered the session that day to talk about the what ifs. But, we really didn't know what was coming—I guess you never really do.

It was a very strange reality for me as I began work on this sermon. To realize that we have been worshipping at home for almost one full liturgical, or church year, astounds me. We have now observed every liturgical season and day from home—certainly gathered together in spirit, but not in body. From Ash Wednesday, to Lent and Holy Week, to Easter, to Pentecost, to Advent and Christmas and all the ordinary and special sacred days in between, we have now done it all from a distance. That means of course that one full secular calendar year is not far behind. The gospel reading on the first Sunday of Lent includes Jesus' time in the wilderness. It is especially interesting to reflect on the wilderness this year as our world has been living in the wilderness of a devastating global pandemic. This pandemic has caused more pain and suffering than any of us may have even thought possible back in early 2020. In fact, one could argue that we have been living in a wilderness that goes beyond the 40 days of Lent—we never really left it.

I want to take amount her to give a little bit of thanks. I need to say that I am thankful for everything that has allowed us to stay connected during this wilderness time. All of us may have a love/hate relationship with technology at this point. Some weeks,

all you have to do is say Zoom to me and I break out in hives. Not really, but you get the point. All joking aside, thanks to technology, the church has remained active in many ways and we are brought together for worship each week in the safest way possible.

Many different people contribute to putting together the worship service each week and I want to take a moment to say thank you. It is full of moving pieces and takes a lot of time.

So thank you to our Director of Music, Ursula, who provides music and helps organize our vocalists each week.

Thank you to Karen Young as worship elder who has given time and organization to making sure we have liturgists and who has provided endless support to all of us worship leaders.

Thank you to all of you who have served as a liturgist. God calls people of all ages to lead God's people in worship and it is a blessing to work with you all.

Thank you to all the vocalists and musicians who spend time practicing and then share their gifts of music with us all.

Thank you to those who have prepared and delivered sermons when David and I have needed some time off with our family.

Thank you to our Facilities Manager, Chick who has had to learn how to operate AV equipment and keep a schedule of all the parts and people that need to be recorded. He even bought a ledger to keep track of it all!

Thank you to our Office Manager, Brooke who makes sure that the service and bulletin find its way to

all of you each week either by regular mail, email, or on various online sites.

And thank you to someone none of you know, Tyler, who stitches our service together each week, editing it into a whole, complete worship service.

And thank you to the session who has been on the frontlines throughout the pandemic making tough, but correct, thoughtful and safe decisions. And thanks to the session for making sure we installed a camera so we could record worship and someday stream worship.

And to all of you at home, whether you watch the service or read the hard copy, thank you, for continuing to make the worship of God a priority in your life. We will get through this and one day will be back together again —the sanctuary filled with voices and people proclaiming the Good News together.

Why spend time talking about all these people? Well, that is easy—for me there was a direct connection between what we do each week to ensure the maintenance of divine worship and our scripture this morning. Here we are with Mark's telling of wilderness narrative. In true Markan fashion it is a whopping 2 whole verses. It is quick, to the point and mysterious. Mark really wouldn't have done well with a teacher that required a particular minimum length for an essay, that is for sure. I mean goodness, Luke and Matthew tell so much more. Their narratives are 11 and 13 verses and go into more detail about Jesus' temptation and response.

With Mark, we have "And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him." In fact, if you read this too quickly or right before bed, you might just gloss right over it. The verses leading up to this are those that tell the story of Jesus' baptism which I actually preached on a few weeks ago during the Baptism of the

Lord Sunday. The voice from Heaven cries out: “you are my son the beloved, with you I am well pleased.” And immediately, the Spirit drives him out into the wilderness. In Mark’s narrative, there is no Baptism brunch, family photos, or cake for Jesus...

God has claimed Jesus as beloved which does not disappear when he heads into the wilderness. Instead, he carries that identity with him everywhere he goes—especially as he descends into the time in the wilderness. This is true for all of us. We are God’s beloved child during the highs and lows of life, during the mountaintop experiences and during the wilderness times. Just as God did not leave Jesus in the wilderness, God will not leave us.

As I said, Mark’s description of the wilderness time is 2 short verses. But boy there is a lot there.

We know he was in the wilderness for 40 days—the 40 of course symbolic to many Biblical references including but not limited to Israel’s 40 years in the desert and Moses’ 40 days on the mountain. And it is the 40 from which we have a 40 day Lenten period.

He was tempted by Satan. It was not a 40 day vacation or a 40 day break from reality. It was a challenging time. It was a barren time filled with challenges of doubt, fear and emotion. Drawing from the other gospels we have a little more description on what those temptations were.

He was with the wild beasts. Wild beasts are scary—he wasn’t with a pack of puppies or lambs—it was wild beasts. Our imaginations can paint a picture on what those would be. When I hear wild beasts I typically think of things that I would NOT want to encounter all alone with no place to shelter and no community to draw strength from.

The Angels waited on him. —That was a verse that kept coming to my mind again and again. The word used here is the same Greek word we explored a couple of weeks ago during Jesus' first healing narrative. *Diakoneō*. The word can be translated as to serve or minister to. You may remember that we talked about Jesus coming to heal Simon's mother-in-law. And in response to that healing she served. It was a story of the first deacon—serving others in response to Jesus' gracious healing.

Now, of course, our story this morning comes chronologically before the healing narrative I mention here. So when read as a whole, the reader would have first encountered *diakoneō* in Mark during Jesus' time in the wilderness. Then almost immediately after that, Mark uses the word again to talk about Simon's mother-in-law. The angels served Jesus. They cared for and ministered to him—to God's beloved. Jesus then moved from his time in the wilderness to serve the people by healing and teaching and leading. And then the people are called into that service. We are all called to serve Jesus and each other.

So back to my thanks for all the people—for all of you. We are all called to serve Jesus and each other during this pandemic wilderness. One of the ways I have seen this is through all the people who come together each week to serve God by leading worship. It is a ministry to each other and to our world. Now more than ever we need our church community to hold us up and support us as we journey through this wilderness. But we also need to continue to carry the message of God's love to the world—that we are God's beloved—that we matter—that we are forgiven. We need to be a beacon of hope that the kingdom of God is here pushing us to do what is right, serving those who are stuck in the wilderness and looking forward with hope to the future.

Maybe you are one that has been faithful in participating in home worship. That is an act of service, too. You are serving God by worshipping Him. And in serving God and keeping God at your center, you are then able to take God's message of hope, healing and redemption to our hurting world. The line I always think about is that we come together to worship and we scatter to serve. We scatter to *diakoneō*—to service—to ministry — to take care of each other.

During this period of Lent, you may have a spiritual discipline that works for you or perhaps you are trying something new this year. If you received your Lenten Packet put together by our fellowship committee, you have a lot of great practices at your fingertips which will connect you to the Biblical story as well as outward *diakoneō* or service.

No matter what though, Lent is not to be a time to feel miserable over our sins or our shortcomings. We are not to travel through these 40 days thinking about all that we should do our shouldn't do in a vicious cycle that just paralyzes us and causes us deep feelings of guilt. We also aren't to take up an empty practice just to feel better about ourselves. Instead, we should take Jesus' words to heart: "*Repent and believe in the good news.*"

Repent, confess and once you do, let it go. Know that Jesus has taken it on for you. Believe in the good news. Celebrate it, proclaim it and let it call you, push you to active service. Serve God and Christ by loving each other and doing for each other. And know that Christ is right there with you during all the wildernesses of this life. He is there walking with you up and down the mountains of life, through the wilderness, to the cross, and ultimately to the joy and hope of Easter morning.

As you travel through the wilderness, repent and believe the good news. You are God's beloved child called

to service and ministry and healing. Thanks be to God.
Amen.

Responding to God's Word

Affirmation of Faith

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer

God our helper, we thank you for keeping our lives always in your care and protection and pray for any and all who are in harm's way.

For those walking in the midst of danger...

for those who are treading a slippery path...

for those exhausted and seeking relief...

for those who face a mountain of worry or debt...

or any other obstacles...

Be Guardian and Guide, we pray, setting all our feet on your paths of righteousness and peace.

We pray for all whose who are struggling with a new challenge or call...

with a major transition in life or livelihood...
with their faith and understanding...
with grief, ancient or new...
Keep in your tender care and mercy O God,
those who are sick in mind, body, or spirit...
those weighed down by depression or pain...
those recuperating from surgery or accident...

Protect not only us and those we love, but also the
whole wide world you so love. In places of war,
bring peace...

In places beset by natural disaster, bring calm and
restoration...

Where there is unrest and injustice, make justice
our aim.

Where hope has grown tired and thin, lift our
sights, so that we may see hope beyond hope, life
beyond death, and you, lifted up before us,
In the name of Christ who taught us to pray..

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy
name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on
earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily
bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our
debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but
deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and
the power and the glory forever. Amen.**

Closing Hymn: *God of the Sparrow* #22

Benediction

You are free from condemnation, free to question,
free to seek, knowing God's love surround you in
both the dark of night and the light of day and
through any wilderness you find yourself dwelling
in. Go in peace. Amen.