

First Sunday in Lent, Gospel Year B

The Zones We Inhabit

Mark 1:9-15

First Sunday in Lent

Analysis by Glenn L. Monson

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 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. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."



DIAGNOSIS: Fantasy, Comfort, and Deadness

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Fantasy Zones

It sure is good knowing we are beloved children of God. We can easily imagine the day of our baptism when the voice above us rang forth, "Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever." We are grateful that the liturgy no longer continues with the phrase, "From now on you shall know the Lord, the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering." We always wondered about that suffering thing. What do you mean, suffering? Suffering and baptism aren't related in our minds. Being a child of God is like getting adopted into the richest family in the world and living at Disney World forever, right?

Step 2: Advance Diagnosis (Internal Problem) Comfort Zones, Not!

Now we are really confused. One minute we are basking in the warm waters of baptism and the next we are expelled into the wilderness? What gives? This will not do! There must be some mistake. Children of God don't get driven into the wildernesses in our version of the story. What happened to God as the ultimate Sugar Daddy? What happened to the baptismal story that ends, "...and they lived happily ever after. The End."? Children of God experiencing temptation and suffering, hunger and lack, and a real-life encounter with the Devil? God forbid! This could never be the way of Christ, could it? In any case, this must never happen to us!

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Dead Zones

We have decided we are not leaving our comfort zones. We have decided that the wilderness is no place for a child of God. Suffering, temptation, evil, and death are not going to be part of our story. No sirree! We are staying in our comfort zones and making sure that hunger and lack, pain and temptation, never come our way. After all, doesn't Jesus say, "I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly"? Doesn't Jesus promise life? And blessing? That old prosperity gospel sounds pretty good, come to think of it. Of course, there's only one problem: our comfort zone is actually a dead zone. Our comfort zone is actually a grave. Our comfort zone is a sepulcher from which there is no resurrection because Jesus is not present. Jesus is in the wilderness that we have refused to enter. Jesus is with the sick, not the well, the sinner not the righteous, the dying not the comfortable. We have been asked to be left alone, and our wish has been granted.

PROGNOSIS: Rescue, Reconstruction, and Peace



Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Rescue Zones

God drives Jesus into the wilderness for our sake. In the wilderness, Jesus defeats the powers of evil and expels them from his presence. God also drives Jesus into the wilderness, into the dead zones of our lives, to find us and rescue us, who so foolishly have lost our way in lives of deadening indulgence, self-righteousness, and indifference. Jesus becomes the Good Shepherd, searching behind every rock and in every crevice until he finds us, lost, bleeding, and pitiful in the wilderness of our choosing. Jesus becomes the Prodigal Father, running out to embrace his offspring who have so foolishly wandered away only to find themselves in want and need. Jesus comes into our wilderness, rescues us through the power of the Cross, puts us on his shoulders, and takes us home.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Reconstruction Zones

We who thought we knew what it truly means to be a child of God have had our eyes opened to a whole new way of living. The wilderness we so feared, we suddenly realize is filled, not only with wild beasts but with ministering angels. Yes, there are scary things in the wilderness, but we are not alone. The Body of Christ—the People of God—stand with us in our suffering. The Holy Spirit, the Comforter, is ever near. And Jesus, himself, walks with us and promises, “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Finding ourselves in the presence of the Savior, even while still in the wilderness, we rejoice.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Peace Zones

Our fear of the wilderness is melting away, and as it does we are able to help others who are unsure of themselves. We bear witness to Christ’s presence in the days of hunger, temptation, and evil, and, to our surprise, others begin to refer to us occasionally as “angels.” We see now that the wilderness has always been a place where God shows up. We see the wilderness now as a place where we hear and see God more clearly. We begin to find solace and peace in the wilderness, and we invite others to join us there as well. God is present. We are at peace.