

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

February 22, 2015
First Sunday in Lent, Year B

The readings this week:

- Genesis 9:8-17 ◦ Psalm 25:1-10
- 1 Peter 3:18-22 ◦ Mark 1:9-15



[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Lent: Why on Earth Would We Do It?

"In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan."

It sounds fairly dry and matter-of-fact, doesn't it? But there's a lot going on between the lines. Jesus' home and family are in Nazareth of Galilee, and Jesus isn't. This isn't 21st-century white and middle-class America, when adults are expected to leave home to go to college, travel if they can afford it, and find their way in the world alone. It's first-century Palestine, and the decent thing for Jesus to do, by conventional standards would be for him to stay in Nazareth and look after his mother (and his father, if he's alive -- the gospels' silence about Joseph after Jesus' childhood suggests to some that he may have died) until they died, and to make sure they got an honorable burial. That would be the decent thing for a son to do.

Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Jesus left his home -- abandoned his family, they would say in the village -- on a spiritual quest.

We have now entered the desert of Lent on a spiritual quest of our own. Lent often gets turned into a very domesticated kind of pious self-improvement; I give up something that most respectable people think is a good thing to give up, at least for a time -- chocolate, beer, swearing, or some such -- drop a few pounds and maybe look a little more like what our culture thinks of as 'good,' and other than the purple on the altar Sunday mornings, hardly notice the difference. But if I want to experience this quest fully, I need to note for myself the ways in which the quest we're on for these forty days is NOT tame or respectable. Jesus left his family and entered a desert with wild beasts and angels (and I don't know about you, but I suspect that the reason that the first thing out of an angel's mouth is "don't be afraid!" is that angels are often at least as terrifying as wild beasts), and we are striving to follow him.

That sounds lonely as well as terrifying. How on earth could we do it? Why on earth would we do it?

I think that this Sunday's gospel provides a clue. Jesus

enters that desert as a man who is discovering his Baptismal identity, taking it in fully and acting on what he hears from God in Baptism. Jesus has no family where he is -- but in Baptism, God calls Jesus his beloved son, and Jesus hears God say, "with you I am well pleased."

That means that Jesus has a family. His family by blood is going to come after him to drag him home as a crazy man who's bringing shaming the family name (Mark 2:21), but in Baptism, Jesus has mother and sisters and brothers in whoever does God's will (Mark 3:32-35). Jesus is leaving house and tools, but he will find shelter with others seeking God and God's reign. Jesus is not alone on his journey, and neither are we.

We have one another, and we also have something else on our journey: the opportunity to encounter God as Jesus did, to take in deeply God's word to us that we are God's beloved children, to claim that identity as the central one or maybe even the only one we have.

I don't think that Jesus spent his life after his Baptism trying to figure out what a good person, a good teacher, a good friend, a good leader would say or do and then trying to say or do that. I believe that Jesus sought the living God, claimed his identity as God's child, and let his life, his words, his relationships, and his love, even to giving of himself on the cross, flow from that identity as God's beloved.

Perhaps that's what God is calling me to do this Lenten season: to follow Jesus into that desert to listen deeply for what God has to say to me through my Baptism. And if that's God's call, those wild beasts won't destroy anything worth keeping. Mr. Beaver said of Aslan, "he isn't tame, but he's good," and I believe that's true of God as well. I want to be alive in the spirit, as Jesus was, and that's a good enough reason to follow Jesus. If God is there, I won't be alone.

And besides, you're coming too, aren't you?

From [Dylan's Lectionary Blog](#)



Reflecting on the Word



___ 1st Reading: Genesis 9:8-17

In what situations is it good to make a contract? Have you ever had someone not keep all the obligations of a contract with you? What agreement(s) do you have with God? Has He kept His side of the agreement(s)? How are you trusting in God's promises today? In what ways do you need to lean more on His good promises? The rainbow is a guarantee that God cares for His creatures. When you see a rainbow, don't just admire its beauty, remember that it is a guarantee that God cares for both people and animals. Think of examples of God's care in your life. [*His Good Covenants, David Cook*](#), [*Growing Christians*](#)

___ Psalm Reading: Psalm 25:1-10

How would you translate the first verse into today's language? How does this set the tone for the remainder of the reading? What might the psalmist have done that he is now pleading for forgiveness from God? What does it take for you to ask for forgiveness? How does the psalmist ask for guidance from God? What do each of these ways reveal about the psalmist? about God? What does the psalmist appeal to for his forgiveness? How do verses 8 through 10 reveal that the psalmist has been transformed? [*Nurturing Faith*](#)

May vocation be the source of your life in God. May the callings of your life be centered in Christ. May the work you are called to do be enlivened by the Spirit.

From Called to Live, Colleague Institute Seminars

I want to suffer well.

Today we live in the land of the free and home of the brave. Tomorrow we might be forbidden to worship. We might be mocked by friends. We might be alone. I don't know what might happen.

But I want to suffer well for the Lord who suffered well for me.

~ Robin Koshy

Praying Toward Sunday

Lord, I know how much you love me.
It's hard for me to feel it sometimes,
but I know your love is always with me.

Help me to use your love as a way
to persevere in my Lenten intentions.
I am weak, but I know with your help,

I can use these small sacrifices in my life to
draw closer to you.
May the Lord bless us,
protect us from all evil
and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

[*Praying Lent, Creighton University*](#)



Noah's ark,
Hanna Cheriyan Varghese,
Malaysia.

___ 3rd Reading: 1 Peter 3:18-22

What has Christ done for us? How do we get to God? What is our role in this process? (This is a very tricky passage, with many divergent interpretations.) What are some of the feelings we might share that Noah and believers in Peter's day had? How can we respond to the coldness of the masses? How does II Peter 2:5 describe Noah's ministry? How did the people respond to his proclamation? How can we imitate him? How is Noah's experience a foreshadowing of baptism? What then saves us? What is the proper attitude toward believer's baptism highlighted here? What does this say of the state of the heart of a believer who hasn't been baptized? What comfort can we receive from verse 22? [*Blacksburg Christian Fellowship*](#)

___ 4th Reading: Mark 1:9-15

Despite his greatness, Jesus came to John for baptism. What does this tell us about Jesus' relationship to us? How do the events surrounding Jesus' baptism prepare him for his temptation in the desert? How does Jesus summarize his mission at the beginning of his ministry? What temptations are you currently struggling with? What encouragement do you find here for facing your own temptations? [*Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press*](#)