

Stretching Toward Sunday

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

February 21, 2021
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](#)

Lenten Transformation

Every religion has ways of talking about transformation: repentance, conversion, being illuminated. We all feel the stirrings within us of the need for change, but it is so hard to do.

In Mark's simple way, we hear in a few short verses how Jesus came from obscurity, was baptized, spent time alone with God in the wilderness, and, when John's ministry was over, emerged to start his own.

Lent is our wilderness time. If we are hoping to turn our hearts toward God this Lenten season, we must start with transformation. The need, the desire.

Honestly, I think that's what people are after when they set out to lose 20 pounds by giving up sweets during Lent. It's the idea of being transformed into some better version of ourselves. We want to be thinner, nicer, more humble, more spiritual.

Jesus talked about repentance, which means to turn. To stop what we're doing and do something different, or do the same thing in a different way. It requires change.

We get into habits, even spiritual habits, that become rote. Change is good for the mind, good for the soul. Doing something different during Lent can make us rethink, re-establish, who we are with God, who we are with others, who we are within ourselves.

We never stop developing. Yes, it gets harder to change old habits when they've been ingrained in us for decades. But that certainly doesn't mean it's impossible. Habits like not looking for God's presence in the world, no longer hearing the rustling of the Spirit, sleepwalking through life.

Transformation may be huge. But it may also be small, incremental. I would never be so bold as to tell you what type of change or transformation you should attempt, but here are a few thoughts: 1) One minute of silence each morning. 2) One page of reading something deep and important. 3) Opening and ending the day in the presence of God. 4) Giving thanks throughout the day. 4) Writing one sentence or a paragraph in a journal—just thoughts

and hopes, or fears, or emotions—positive or negative. Honestly, God cares about all of it.

Here we are, every morning, with the opportunity to make that day a new one.

How will you be transformed?

~ Melissa Bane Sevier, [Contemplative Viewfinder](#)



Temptations

*Jesus was in the wilderness forty days,
tempted by Satan;
and he was with the wild beasts;
and the angels waited on him.*

~ Mark 1.13

What are your temptations?
Not sex and chocolate, OK?
Not beauty, not pleasure.

I mean the things that ruin you,
things that get in your way,
that lead you away from deep life.

What gets in the way of your perfect love?
What distorts your wisdom and vision?
What inhibits your kindness and courage?

Now. Remember when you fell in love?
You didn't work at it, did you? It was a gift.
You bring the gift with you to the desert.

You'll never vanquish your temptations.
You just have to remember the gift:
you already love God more than those things.

~ Steve Garnaas-Holmes, [Unfolding Light](#)

Reflecting on the Word



___ 1st Reading: [Genesis 9:8-17](#)

What does this story tell us about our ancient ancestors and their view of the world? Their view of God? How does this text relate to our call to care for the earth? What vision of healing and reconciliation does this text offer? How would you define (or describe) hope? How might this story shape our response to those affected by natural disasters? [Weekly Seeds](#)

___ Psalm Reading: [Psalm 25:1-10](#)

What does it mean to “submit” to someone or something? Do we usually view this as a good or bad thing? What does it mean to “put trust” in someone or something? What kind of humiliation was David afraid of? What risk do we face when we put complete trust in someone or something? What does David request in v. 4-5? Beyond the metaphors, what is David specifically asking God to do? Why might David remind God of God’s past mercy and love? How might it be helpful for us when we are seeking God’s direction, to remind ourselves of God’s past grace to us? How might God’s kindness and fairness lead God to instruct us in God’s ways? Is verse 10 a promise that God will make everything easy to those who keep covenant with God? If not, what does it mean? Some people speak of trying to find “God’s will,” meaning they are looking for a certain set of directions in a specific situation. Have you ever sought that kind of guidance? Have you ever received it? Why is “self-directing” our lives such a heavy burden at times? How can submitting ourselves to God actually be freeing, rather than stifling? [Faith Element](#)



Praying Toward Sunday

i just realized
that in my imagination
the wilderness is always somewhere else;
a foreign landscape i actively have to enter
in the act of being faithful.
truthfully,
the wilderness is always where i am
right now
and faith is the courage to stay with it
when i'd rather pretend i am
anywhere else.

~ Cheryl Lawrie, [\[hold this space\]](#)

Tempted

And so we are tempted of Satan, tempted to give up, to despair. Tempted to cynicism. Tempted sometimes to cruelty. Tempted not to help others when we know we can, because, we think, what's the use. Tempted to banish from our life all that we really hold most dear, and that is love, tempted to lock ourselves up, so that when we pass by people feel, 'There goes a dead man.' And behind each and all of these temptations is the temptation to disbelieve in what we are, the temptation to distrust ourselves, to deny that is the Spirit himself which beareth witness with our spirit. God in us.

~ Harry Williams 1919-2006 True Wilderness, quoted from Celebrating the Seasons (Morehouse), via Suzanne Guthrie, [At the Edge of Enclosure](#)

___ 3rd Reading: [1 Peter 3:18-22](#)

If you had to explain this passage to someone, what would you say is the main point? 1 Peter 3:18 has a lot to say about Jesus and what his death accomplished for us. What stands out to you from this description? This passage teaches us that the suffering we go through is not the last word for believers. Are you facing any situations currently that you find it difficult to see a positive end to? How does this passage speak to that situation? [Wilingdon Church](#)

___ 4th Reading: [Mark 1:9-15](#)

Why does Mark tell the people what region Nazareth was in, and what does this tell you about his audience? Why would Jesus need to be baptized? Mark tells us the Spirit descended on Jesus “like a dove.” What do you think the witnesses to this event actually saw? Why did Jesus, the sinless Son of God, need the Holy Spirit? Why did God see fit to announce that Jesus was His “beloved Son” and what does this convey to us? In what sense was God “well pleased” with Jesus, and why did God choose this time to make this pronouncement? What does the fact that Jesus presented Himself for baptism tell us about the importance of being baptized? Is baptism a necessity? If you are a professing believer: have you been baptized, and if not, what should you do next? Jesus received the Holy Spirit at the beginning of His earthly ministry and immediately the Holy Spirit was active in His life. In what ways is the Holy Spirit active in your life? In what ways do you need to improve on listening for and heeding His leading? [Bible Church of Cabot](#)