

Stretching Toward Sunday

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

March 10, 2019
First Sunday in Lent, Year C

The readings this week:

- Deuteronomy 26:1-11 ◦ Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16
- Romans 10:8b-13 ◦ Luke 4:1-13

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

A Call to Identity and Action

Lent is here again. Ashes have been smudged into foreheads accompanied by sobering words of our fleeting reality. The "alleluias" are buried until Easter. Lenten disciplines are well under way; denials of chocolate, adult beverages, desserts, meat, spending, and all manner of deprivations have been promised. Yet is that all there is to these 40 days?



Lent is supposed to be a time of formation, a time to reflect on one's identity as a follower of Christ and to figure out exactly what that means. Discipleship, after all, is supposed to be a way of living and being rather than a label or "club membership."

How best to keep this season is an important consideration for those of us who plan and lead worship, who have responsibility for Christian

education, and who craft parish communications. How can we best experience this season of the Church year in a way that is fresh and enduring, reflective and renewing, and effective in supporting faith formation? What does it mean for people of faith to journey into the Lenten wilderness today?

The familiar lessons for this First Sunday in Lent offer some good entry points into a multi-week emphasis on our call to identity AND our call to action. We think, or maybe assume, we know who we are based on established models of mainline faith and good behavior. But, in a world of shifting sand and mainline upheaval, we dare not make assumptions or rely on comfortable, worn methods and programs.

The reading from Deuteronomy (26:1-11) reminds us that a good place to begin is counting one's blessings and giving thanks. It is entirely too easy to see our little bowl of life as pitifully empty instead of full and overflowing. Of course we're not alone; God's chosen people have a seriously short memory when it came to appreciating all

that the LORD has done. They see wilderness rather than redemption. They hanker for the "good ol' days" in Egypt instead of anticipating life in the Promised Land. You just can't please some folks—then or now. Still, we remind the people of God of the rich blessings we share, and we encourage one another to share all that God has entrusted to us and to give of our best, not the rest. If you've never considered beginning Lent with a stewardship sermon, well here's your opportunity to call for some action to go with the identity.

Paul's message to the Christians in Rome (Romans 10:8b-13) reminds us of the simple yet profound power of our identity that comes in the confession "Jesus is Lord." All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. This is not some empty promise nor merely nice-sounding words. This is the confession of faith that identifies us as people of God. Lent calls us to examine this identity and to reflect on whether we are living into it.

Finally, in the Gospel story of Jesus being led into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan, we are challenged to turn familiar stones in search of new insight. Jesus, Son of God, stands firm in the face of three challenges to his identity and authority—human comfort, power and authority, and proof of divine identity. We encounter no temptation that our Lord has not faced and defeated.

Notice what happens next: Jesus "filled with the power of the Spirit," begins his ministry. Identity confirmed, the Son of God takes action. So, too, may our Lenten examination of identity lead to renewed focus and action. These 40 days are about much more than denial or temporary disciplines. Each day invites us to live life in the Spirit, to grow in faith, and to be the presence of Christ in the wilderness of this world. Blessings on your journey!

~ Sharron R. Blezard, [Stewardship of Life](#)

LENT
is for
LIFE



not just
for
chocolate.



Reflecting on the Word



___ 1st Reading: Deuteronomy 26:1-11

What things has Jesus Christ delivered you from that you are most grateful for? What gifts or resources has God blessed you with that have inspired you to generosity? Verse 11 commands us to celebrate God's mighty deeds on our behalf with the clergy and with the aliens who reside among us. How might we encourage our clergy or share our faith and our generosity with those who are outside the family of the Church? Is there a connection between gratitude and generosity? And if so, what is it? Can you have one without the other? How is giving an extension of gratefulness? *The Episcopal Church*

___ Psalm Reading: Psalms 91:1-2, 9-16

Who or what do you really trust when all else fails? Where do you go when you need a safe place? In verses 1 & 2, what four names of God does the psalmist use? When talking to God, do you ever use these names? Is God's protection available to everyone? What does it mean to make God your dwelling place? Does verse 11 indicate that angels are watching over you, protecting you? Do you think you've ever seen an angel? What two keys to deliverance are given in verse 14? What description is given of the refuge God promises to provide? In what ways can we be a refuge to others? What are you particularly anxious about these days, for which God is waiting on you to call his name and acknowledge your need? How can you make God your dwelling place, your refuge, your shield, in times of trouble? *Eagle Christian Church*

Here, at the outer limits of Lent,
we are called to walk:
to the paper-thin edges which cut us
to the soul;
to the workplaces which weary us;
to the people who confuse us;
to the faith which threatens us.

Here, at the corner of Steadfast Love and Faithfulness,

we are called to wait:
when our clenched stomachs awaken us;
in the moments of unbearable sorrow;
with the angels who would carry us.

Here, where time is fulfilled,
where God's Kingdom is as near to us
as our neighbor,

we begin Lent:
with the Beloved,

whose tears wash away our fears,
with the God who will not let go
of our hands.

~ Rev. Thom Shuman, *Lectionary Liturgies*

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]*

___ 3rd Reading: Romans 10:8b-13

Can you remember the time you first came to believe that Jesus is Lord and God, and that "He is risen indeed"? Or have you believed for as long as you can remember? Or do you still struggle with these claims? Why do you suppose these claims were so explosive and controversial in the Roman Empire? Are they still as explosive today or have we become desensitized to them? Relate the materials of verses 8-13 to the entire way of salvation. How would you reply to one who insisted that verse 9 is positive about "faith" and "confession" being the way of salvation? (baptism isn't mentioned). How important is the Word? Why is the word order in verse 9 (confession and faith) different from the word order in verse 10 (faith and confession)? Explain what is involved in the confession that "Jesus is Lord." Is it necessary to believe in the resurrection of Jesus to be a Christian? Are "righteousness" and "salvation" in verse 10 synonymous? How does one "call on the name of the Lord"? Describe what the claims "Jesus is Lord" and "He is risen from the dead" mean to you personally. *Central Christian College, Episcopal Church*

___ 4th Reading: Luke 4:1-13

Generally speaking, when are you most vulnerable to temptation? When you're fatigued, hungry, stressed, lonely, fearful, or in some other weakened condition? What was Jesus' condition at the end of his 40 days in the desert? What methods or strategies does the devil use to tempt him? How does Jesus respond in each case? How does knowing Scripture—marinating in Scripture—help you in your times of testing and temptation? What are "tests" that you have faced in your journey of faith? What are the ways modern Christians "blend in"? What really "proves" our value, our effectiveness, our belovedness? Is there any contradiction between being a Christian and being comfortable? What path will you take in the Lenten season ahead? *Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church, Weekly Seeds*