

South Buxton and Talbot Street Pastoral Charges

First Sunday of Lent – February 26th, 2023

Prelude: by Christie Coatsworth

Welcome & Announcements:

Thank you for your support of all our past services, which are posted on our websites - Southbuxton.ca and Talbotstreet.ca

Lighting of the Christ Candle:

Call to Worship:

Eric: Come into the wilderness.

People: Come away from the world and all that is so familiar, and begin wandering through all that lives here.

Eric: We see there is life here.

People: It is not as barren as we had thought.

Eric: Come into the wilderness and discover that you are not alone.

People: We are together in this sacred place.

Eric: We come to find ourselves changed and restored in this wilderness together.

Opening Hymn: VU 421 “Lead On, O Cloud of Presence”

Lead on, O cloud of Presence, the exodus is come.
In wilderness and desert our tribe shall make its home.
Our slavery left behind us, new hopes within us grow.
We seek the land of promise where milk and honey flow.

Lead on, O fiery Pillar, we follow yet with fears,
but we shall come rejoicing though joy be born of tears.
We are not lost, though wandering, for by your light we come,
and we are still God's people. The journey is our home.

Lead on, O God of freedom, and guide us on our way,
and help us trust the promise through struggle and delay.
We pray our sons and daughters may journey to that land
where justice dwells with mercy, and love is law's demand.

Prayer of Confession:

People: O God, this isn't a place we want to be. It is not a place we would choose because the wilderness is so unpredictable and unknown. The uncertainty challenges us, and brings us closer to doubt.

We confess that this isn't a place that we expect to find you, but we are looking for companions and possibilities in this wilderness place. We pray you will hold us in your grace, O God.

Reflection Music: "Hold Us in Your Grace"

Words of Affirmation:

Eric: Beloved, we are held here with all we are and all we are feeling. God will instruct us and teach us the way to go. Steadfast love surrounds us, now and always.

Children's Story & Lord's Prayer:

Children's Hymn: VU 570 "Jesus' Hands Were Kind Hands"

Jesus' hands were kind hands, doing good to all,
healing pain and sickness, blessing children small,
washing tired feet, and saving those who fall;
Jesus' hands were kind hands, doing good to all.

Take my hands, O Jesus, let them work for you,
make them strong and gentle, kind in all I do;
let me watch you, Jesus, till I'm gentle too,
till my hands are kind hands, quick to work for you.

Responsive Psalm 32:

The Joy of Forgiveness

Our Lord, you bless everyone whose sins you forgive and wipe away.

You bless them by saying, "You told me your sins, without trying to hide them, and now I forgive you."

Before I confessed my sins, my bones felt limp, and I groaned all day long.

Night and day your hand weighed heavily on me, and my strength was gone as in the summer heat.

So I confessed my sins and told them all to you. I said, "I'll tell the Lord each one of my sins." Then you forgave me and took away my guilt.

We worship you, Lord, and we should always pray whenever we find out that we have sinned. Then we won't be swept away by a raging flood.

You are my hiding place! You protect me from trouble, and you put songs in my heart because you have saved me.

You said to me, "I will point out the road that you should follow. I will be your teacher and watch over you.

Don't be stupid like horses and mules that must be led with ropes to make them obey."

All kinds of troubles will strike the wicked, but your kindness shields those who trust you, Lord.

And so your good people should celebrate and shout.

Scripture: Matthew 4: 1 – 11

The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert, so that the devil could test him. After Jesus had gone without eating for 40 days and nights, he was very hungry. Then the devil came to him

and said, "If you are God's Son, tell these stones to turn into bread." Jesus answered, "The Scriptures say: 'No one can live only on food. People need every word that God has spoken.'" Next, the devil took Jesus into the holy city to the highest part of the temple. The devil said, "If you are God's Son, jump off. The Scriptures say: 'God will give his angels orders about you. They will catch you in their arms, and you won't hurt your feet on the stones.'" Jesus answered, "The Scriptures also say, 'Don't try to test the Lord your God!'" Finally, the devil took Jesus up on a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms on earth and their power. The devil said to him, "I will give all this to you, if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus answered, "Go away Satan! The Scriptures say: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.'" Then the devil left Jesus, and angels came to help him.

Reflection: "In the Wilderness"

We venture forward with tentative steps into any wilderness experience. We are not sure what the wilderness holds, so we step forward with curious, yet bold steps. As we journey into the wilderness; may our eyes see new things, and may our hearts feel new feelings. May exploring the wilderness fulfill our longings of adventure. May we like Christ renew and focus our faith on the important things of life.

Lent is all about the journey – not only the journey into the wilderness of our faith, but also the journey of following Jesus towards Jerusalem. Reflecting on Jesus' experiences and our own wilderness experiences, may we look deep within ourselves, and test and strengthen our faith.

Our wildernesses may be; a wild desert wasteland or a lush jungle; it may be the depths of the ocean or the ice of the Arctic or Antarctic. Our wilderness could also be those times in our lives where we do not feel comfortable, or when we are afraid of the unknown, or when life deals us a time of life changes; health issues, loss of job, unhealthy temptations (both of food and of actions), divorce or retirement. We are invited into these wildernesses this Lent with a sense of adventure and curiosity. The journey can be great fun!

Our Responsive Psalm today, explores our relationship with a loving God who is our hiding place. God preserves us, and surrounds us, and protects us. Psalm 32 may remind us of last week's message of Peter building the shelters to remind him of God's protection and faithfulness. Today we reminded that God provides and we are not alone – much like Jesus was not alone in today's story.

Matthew starts out Jesus' ministry right after his baptism, but heading into the wilderness and figuring out what to do next. Jesus is going through what we might call today – "a time of discernment". In Jewish tradition, when you are trying to figure things out you do so without eating – we call that "fasting". In a few days

your mind becomes sharper and is able to better work through life decisions. We are told Jesus spent 40 days and 40 nights in the desert.

The number 40 is mentioned 146 times in Scripture, the number 40 generally symbolizes a period of testing, trial or probation. During Moses' life, he lived forty years in Egypt and forty years in the desert before God selected him to lead his people out of slavery. Moses was also on Mount Sinai for 40 days and nights, on two separate occasions, receiving God's laws. He also sent spies, for forty days, to investigate the land God promised the Israelites as an inheritance.

The prophet Jonah powerfully warned ancient Nineveh, for forty days, that its destruction would come because of its many sins. The prophet Ezekiel laid on His right side for 40 days to symbolize Judah's sins. Jesus spends 40 days in the wilderness which parallels Israel's very important story of the Exodus and the forty years they spent in the desert.

In both Jewish and Christian traditions as well as many other traditions around the world, before you enter unto another's land or plan your ministry, preparation in the presence of God opens the way.

Jesus does not go alone. Three other figures play roles in today's story. The Spirit "leads" Jesus into the wilderness. Often this story is seen as a time of testing for Jesus – perhaps it is also helpful to look at it through the lens of Jesus being with himself and with God. As we believe – "The Trinity: God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit, as Three in One.

Matthew shares that the second figure as the tempter, the devil - Satan. Within this story, the tempter puts a face on the presence of evil in the world by tempting "ends" that overlook the "means" used to achieve them. The tempter's offers to Jesus are; more power, more possessions, and so on. These are the very things we modern day people strive for. We know of people who will give away their soul – "so to speak" to get more power and more possessions.

The third figure(s) are the angels at the story's end. Their "waiting on" Jesus translates a Greek verb (diakoneo) that also means "minister" or "serve at table."

The wilderness can be any place not affected by human involvement – you are alone. In the wilderness, we often feel that we do not have enough food, time, possessions, wealth and power. Some people, when they are in the wilderness, eat excessively and gain weight. Others go shopping to acquire more possessions – easy to do with a credit card – harder to pay off the credit card. Others living in the

wilderness, steal from family members, or borrow money with no intention or means to pay it back. Some while in the wilderness use drugs and alcohol to feel they can control the situation – we know, and they eventually find out – they can't control life while under the influence. Many times, when under the influence, causes so many new issues.

Matthew shares when we follow the Spirit into the wilderness, we find that what may feel like we are venturing alone. In time, we realize we are accompanied by God. We come to understand that often we see the wilderness as a place of struggle, but the Spirit never leaves us; instead the Holy Spirit travels with us into the unknown. As we begin the adventure of Lent in whatever wilderness we find ourselves surrounded by, we can find new insights from God.

For rural folks, a physical “wilderness” is usually considered a place far away from civilization. Yet today many folks find themselves in the wilderness in the middle of an urban city, surrounded by people, yet feeling alone. Where might we see God in the inner city? Sometimes it is in the cross of the church steeple that invites those to come and find the Holy among the mundane. Sometimes it is the person who serves you the hot soup with a smile. Sometimes it is the person who stops to put a loonie in your outstretched hand, and stops to talk for a few seconds. We may never really know in the present, how we are helping others to find God's Holy Presence.

A phrase told to business people who are trying to improve themselves, or to take on the next big step is, “Know your why!” This question can be powerful. In 2022, a group of 4 US military Veterans rowed across the Atlantic as part of a fundraiser for Veteran Suicide. “Foar From Home” (<https://foarfromhome.com>) was crystal clear about their “why” – to fundraise for organizations that help veterans with PTSD and to prevent veteran suicide. Knowing what matters most can serve as a guidepost and help us see clearly when we may feel lost.

Jesus' wilderness experience confirmed what mattered for him – Jesus knew his “why.”

We all know what it is like to take on a new undertaking. Even young children are aware of some of the feelings associated with a first day at preschool or the anticipation of a vacation or other big event. For those of us who are older, we can easily recall the feelings we experienced as we started many different activities.

We may not consider the First Sunday in Lent as the notion of a new beginning, but we know we are entering a new time of serious reflection and possible transformation. The feelings can become real, and be similar to the feelings of starting a new adventure. Might we see this Lent as an adventure which God invites us to experience?

As we hear today's story and realize that Jesus was not alone - may we too know we are not alone. God is always with us. Thanks be to God.

Reflection Hymn: VU 135 "Beneath the Cross of Jesus"

Beneath the cross of Jesus
I fain would take my stand:
the shadow of a mighty rock
within a weary land,
a home within the wilderness,
a rest upon the way,
from the burning of the noontide heat
and the burden of the day.

Upon the cross of Jesus
my eyes at times can see
the very dying form of one
who suffered there for me;
and from my smitten heart, with tears,
two wonders I confess,
the wonder of his glorious love,
and my unworthiness.

I take, O cross, your shadow
for my abiding place;
I ask no other sunshine than
the sunshine of his face,
content to let the world go by,
to know no gain nor loss,
my sinful self my only shame,
my glory all, the cross.

Invitation to Share Our Gifts:

Eric: As we offer our gifts to God, we also bring with us our faltering steps, our brokenness, our hopes, our risking and our hearts, that as God transforms our gifts, God will also transform us to be God's blessed people. We give as an act of gratitude and worship.

Offertory: VU 541 "Praise God From Whom..."

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Offertory Prayer:

People: Take these gifts we offer, loving God, and use them for your work. Take our very selves – our hopes, our dreams, our plans, our wonderings – and use them, too, to make your world a better place. We pray in Christ’s name. Amen.

Prayer Hymn: MV 66 “Senzeni Na?” *(What Have We Done?)*

Senzeni Na? Senzeni Na?
Senzeni Na? Senzeni Na?
Senzeni Na? Senzeni Na?
Senzeni Na? Senzeni Na?

Pastoral Prayer:

Closing Hymn: VU 511 “Before You Now, O God”

Before you now, O God, your servants stand
in answer to your call and Christ's command
to take the gospel with them everywhere,
till all creation knows your endless care.

With diligence and love they shall proclaim
your living Word that breaks away our chains.
With reverence and with joy they'll bless and give
that ministry of hope by which we live.

God, who are we that you still choose and bless,
guide, lead, and feed us through all wilderness?
Give them the strength to rise from every fall.
Confirm with burning hearts this answered call.

Arise, O God, in power and in might.
Lift up your countenance and give us light!
Your saints shall sing with joy what they profess.
Now clothe each one, O God, with righteousness.

Benediction:

Eric: Go with the faith that you are held in grace, now and forever more.

Sending Out Hymn: MV 71 “When the Wind of Winter...”

When the wind of winter blows

bringing times of solitude,
fill the silent icy night,
be our hearts' compassion.

*Holy Light, warm our night;
warm the time of winter,
Holy Light, warm our night;
warm the time of winter.*

Amen, Amen, Amen.

Postlude: – Christie Coatsworth

Prayers: - Please include these people in your prayers this week.

We have offered prayer for these people each Sunday morning just before the Zoom Service.
It was suggested to share these names with the total group – as “In the Spirit We Are One”.

Cancer:

**Chris
Paul
Carol
Maureen
Susan
Cara
Margie
Marcus
Susan
Ingrid
Jerry**

**Reg and Mary Jane
Dave
Bill
Jane
Donna
Martin and Family
Larry
Kerigan
Fran
Ken**

**Natalie
Ruth
Dave
Marj
Sue
Evelyn**

**Richard and Evelyn
Elaine
Wayne**

**Ed Sykes
Arley Smith
Eric
Ron
Wes
Turkey/Syria
Mass Murders
Grant Family**