

“I’m awake... I’m awake!”

- If you were to be a fly on the wall at the Perkins house at 6:30am on a Saturday morning..
  - You might hear me say those words muttered and slurred as I stumble out of bed following a three year old who is already bouncing off the walls
  - My son is a morning person. It skips generations, you know.
  - My dad and Katy’s dad are both early risers, enjoying son rises on vacations and such
  - But not me- I was the kid who would sleep in on Christmas morning, because let’s be honest- the presents weren’t going anywhere
  - But Saturday mornings... it’s me and the little guy, some coffee, and his favorite movie that week
  - It is Katy’s only day to catch a little sleep, so we try to be quiet
  - Here I am, very much not awake, walking on auto-pilot through the house headed toward the coffee pot
  - Sometimes I don’t think my eyes are even open- have you been there?
  - Slow wake up with a cup of coffee
  - It’s very different than a sudden wake up, like with a splash of cold water or something
  - My Saturdays are a process that can take a good 30 minutes on the slower, darker, dreary days
  - I even used to have a coffee mug that said “Wake Up” on the side of it- a double entendre for coffee and Buddhism
  - It is those moments when we are not quite awake yet that I want to think about this morning
  - Or maybe for you waking up is easy, but you do other things without paying much attention, without being “awake” to them
  - Like driving the same route each day, or mindlessly watching TV or Netflix

- So much of our lives are multi-tasked that they get less attention than they deserve, or no attention at all
- Even more so, I want to suggest, are the places within each of us
- The places that shape and define our beliefs, values, and intuition- the core of who we are and will be
- The place behind our mask that no one else can see- where only we and God may tread
- The place we do not consider or explore very often
- It is this place, this wilderness, this desert, that I want us to spend our time here today, and hopefully exploring this year during Lent.
- It seems only appropriate that the first Sunday in our Lenten journey starts with Jesus and his desert journey
  - I am glad that Mark writes of Jesus' baptism and his wilderness journey in one continuous section
  - For Mark, Jesus' ministry as the Son of Man begins here at his Baptism
  - Not at a miraculous birth as Matthew and Luke tell the story
  - And not as in time immortal, as John does it
  - But at age 30 when Jesus is baptized by John in the river Jordan
  - And something happens, something changes for Jesus- he sees the heavens opened up
  - The Spirit descending like a dove onto him
  - And a voice from heaven, describing him as God's son with whom God is well pleased
  - If you ever wonder about the effects of such an intimate encounter with the divine, you can see it in the following sentence
  - "And the Spirit immediately drove him into the wilderness."
  - From a very high mountain top experience, to immediately a dry desert of doubt and struggle
  - In Mark's recount of the life of Jesus, it is here Jesus wrestles within himself and decides who he will be
  - In the wilderness, the automatic and auto-pilot of our core being ceases and we are forced to take a long hard look at who we are and why
  - Jesus was no different.
  - While he may have actually went into a desert and wilderness, a geographical place

- Mark is most concerned with the spiritual dimension of Jesus' journey<sup>1</sup>
- This "wilderness" has wild beasts, angels, and even a satan
- To better understand this, we have to set aside for a moment the Christian idea of Satan as a personified being, a proper noun
- The Jewish understanding of the satan was not a person, or mythical being
- It was a role, a job to be performed
- It was the role of the adversary, the devil's advocate, the appointed defense attorney
- Jesus went into this spiritual wilderness, this desert, with a real debate raging in his soul
- On one hand, the angels and the experience at his Baptism- this new and confusing calling of God to do something very different
- To become the Son of Man, and bridge the gap between God and humanity
- And on the other, the satan, likely suggesting that Jesus just go back to sleep, that it was not worth it
- What difference could one person make anyway?
- Here Jesus, numb this calling and this existential angst with some bread made from stone
- Or distract your restlessness that God has given you with the pursuit of power and wealth
- Numb it, do not address, do not let God's light shine into the darkness of your soul
- It will only end badly.
- It is only upon hearing about the death of his cousin that Jesus returns from the wilderness and has chosen the less traveled path
- I pray that our Lenten wanderings through the liturgical desert mirrors Jesus in many of these ways
  - And if you haven't made a commitment to a spiritual discipline yet, I am certain God will understand and you can still start today
  - I hope that when you combine the solemn reminder of our own mortality from Ash Wednesday
  - With a intentional spiritual practice of giving something up or taking something on

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<sup>1</sup> *Preaching The Revised Common Lectionary Year B Lent/Easter*, Marion Soards, ed., (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992) 26

- That it creates a space for us to then begin wandering in our own spiritual deserts
- Places where we can wrestle and debate the angels and demons that are within
- That we can wake up a little more fully to often ignored and numbed places of our soul where no one can see
- Because like Jesus, albeit perhaps not quite as overwhelming as hearing God's voice and seeing God as a dove
- God is just as much driving us into the desert
- To rethink who we are now, and who God wants us to become this time
- That's why we do this year after year- it's not because it doesn't stick or it doesn't work
- It is because we are different than we were last year, the world in which we live is different it was last year
- And God is calling us to be faithful people today, with who we are now and everything that has happened in the past year or more
- Jesus came back from the wilderness and proclaimed the good news of God: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near."
- "Repent, and believe."
- God is still calling us to be people of faith in a covenant with our creator committed to participating in the Kingdom of God that is still coming
- God is still calling us to repent
- Because let's be honest, while we in the Episcopal church do not focus on it much outside of Lent
- We sin, we fall short of who God calls us to be
- Being a Christian is hard, the promises we make in Baptism and Confirmation demand much
- And while we may get it right sometimes, we certainly mess up
- Who can say we respect the dignity of every human being consistently?
- Or who can say we love our enemies, even those who are trying to kill us, or that we forgive 70\*7
- Who of us is beyond the systemic prejudice and injustice built in to our culture and economy
- No one.
- We need God's grace and forgiveness
- We need God to help us into and through our wilderness.
- And the good news in Lent, because there is good news in Lent amidst the sacrifice and repentance

- That we do not go into the wilderness alone, for Jesus has walked there before
- And we do not struggle with our demons by ourselves, but we take with us the risen Christ who has overcome them
- The wilderness lies before us, full of danger and promise
  - And we have a companion who travels with us
  - Offering comfort when we need it, and perhaps just as often a firm push further out into our wilderness
  - We need this Lent, this journey, this wake-up call year after year, because God is not done with us yet
  - The Kingdom of God is still coming nearer. Repent. Believe.
  - Resist the temptation to numb it, but instead allow the light of Christ to penetrate even the dark recesses of our souls
  - And take the first step of your wilderness journey once again this year.

Godspeed.