

Text: Luke 4: 1-13
Title: Hunger
Date: 03.10.19
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Take this text at face value.
Read it for what it says.

Jesus rises up out of the Jordan River wringing wet from his baptism, stuffed full of the Spirit, and that same Spirit leads him into the wilderness.

The wilderness of scorched sand, dry sky, blistering sun, jagged rock and bone-breaking-aloneness. The wilderness of endless sky, endless night, endless silence. The wilderness of reflection, preparation, and struggle. The wilderness of his faith tradition.

For, like the Israelite's 40 years wandering in the desert, or Elijah's 40 day flight across the desert to Mount Horeb, or Moses' 40 days on the mountain without food, Jesus spends 40 days in the wilderness.

He must have had water – you don't go forty days without water. But, it says he didn't eat. 40 days of weight loss, strength loss, and energy loss. (Have you watched *Naked and Afraid* ~ where two strangers are left naked and alone in the wilderness for three weeks. 21 days without access to food dramatically alters the body. 40 would decimate it...) 40 days of cinching the belt a little tighter and the tunic hanging a little looser. 40 days of his stomach gnawing and gurgling for a bit of manna or a little quail. 40 days and things are shutting down. 40 days in the wilderness and Jesus is one hot-n-hungry Hebrew. Then on day 41 *diablo*, Greek for the devil, drops a taunting suggestion,

If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.

You know the exchange. Jesus quotes Deuteronomy. In turn, the devil suggests super-sizing the meal. And again, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy. Not easily dissuaded, it dawns on the devil that this may be a battle of biblical wits. So, he leads Jesus to the heart of the temple in the heart of the Holy City and from the heart of scripture he throws down a taunting ace,

If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here. For it is written...

And the devil quotes Psalm 91.

Again, there is no evidence of struggle. Jesus doesn't dispute the text or engage in exegetical debate. There is no reference to Jesus in angst and anguish. The divine is taunted by *diablo*,

to put up,
or show up,
or shut up,
or give up.

And, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy.
And with that the devil scurries off to wait for a more opportune time.

Now. This passage echoes the stories in which the Israelites found place and purpose in the wilderness.

So, one way to read this wilderness tale is as the formative crucible through which Jesus comes to terms with who he is, what he is called to, and where he is headed. These are the first steps of exodus ~ the first steps toward the promised land. Jesus grapples with self and Satan and the first steps of the coming Kingdom are taken in the wilderness.

Take this text at face value.
Read it for what it says.
Or, what if we read it this way?

In *Everest: The West Ridge*, mountaineer Thomas Hornbein describes reaching the top of Mount Everest. He writes:

We felt the lonely beauty of the evening, the immense roaring silence of the wind, the tenuousness of our tie to all below. There was a hint of fear, not for our lives, but of the vast unknown which pressed upon us. A fleeting disappointment – that after all those dreams and questions this was only a mountaintop – gave way to suspicion that maybe there was something more, something beyond the three-dimensional form of the moment.

Hornbein is writing about those rare moments when the Divine breaks through and overwhelms the soul. Maybe you've had moments like that. Maybe you've had moments when you felt something beyond the "three-dimensional form of the moment." Moments when you saw things a little sharper,
understood your place a little better,
knew your self more honestly,
heard God's voice more clearly,
felt the mystery in the deepest places of your soul,
and you could only breathe gratitude.

If that's been your experience then you know that we can't manufacture those moments. They come when we're broken by the brutality or surprised by the beauty of life. Some of those moments happen on wilderness mountain tops and some happen in the wilderness of loss. All of those moments are movements of the Spirit. And therefore, we can't make those moments happen....

But. But, maybe we can be more keenly aware of the wilderness.
Maybe we can be more attune to the Spirit.
Maybe we can be more fully aware of our longing or more deeply know our hunger.

The 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness are part of a long tradition wherein clarity of identity and purpose are found through some sort of discipline or deprivation. Throughout history and in all sorts of cultures people have entered into spiritual practices or physical challenges in the hopes of greater insight into the self or more meaningful engagement with God. The language of our text contrasts Jesus being full of the Spirit with Jesus being empty or hungry. And those 40 days are formative for all that follows. They set Jesus on a trajectory toward crucifixion and resurrection.

So, dear friends, as we stand on edge of roughly 40 days until Good Friday and Easter, many of us hope that we will grow, feel, be moved, or somehow encounter God in new, meaningful, and formative ways.

And, in that spirit some of you will give up Facebook or Frappuccinos, and some will commit to times of prayer and silence. In that spirit some will add opportunities to serve others or take up a new rigor in reading scripture.

May God bless you in any and all of those efforts.

May you find a fullness of spirit and a clarity of vision.

However, I want to draw our attention to the wilderness.

I want to begin our journey toward Easter with an awareness of our hunger....

A friend told me recently that she couldn't focus on her work because she was overrun with anger. She felt lost in the constant barrage of tweets and accusations of fake-news and that, as of earlier this week, the Washington Post has counted better than 9000 lies or misleading statements by the President. She's weary of the shredding of cultural norms, the danger to constitutional norms, and the endless clatter of the moral outrage industry. And she knows that if Hillary Clinton were President the same relentless rage and divisiveness would be in the air.

She hates what it's doing to her spirit.

She hates what it's doing to her community.

She longs for some hope or stillness.

She hungers for peace.

I get it. While these are not days of world war or economic depression there is a corrosive spirit that tears at the national fabric, or something that seems chaotic and divisive. There is a wilderness of spirit, or community, or culture.

Some of you traverse a different wilderness.

You know the wilderness of grief or loss. For some its navigating dementia or Alzheimer's. Some of you know the wilderness of addictions, depression, loneliness. Some of you walk the wilderness of cancer and chemo. You get the idea. We all know the terrain of a different wilderness. We all know some hunger for a sense of place, purpose, or peace....

Dear friends, during Lent we're going to pay attention to the wilderness and listen to our longings. Each week in worship we will hear the lament of one of our community. Each week we will be joined in naming that for which we hunger. And, each week will trace the path of Jesus, as recorded by Luke, that leads ultimately to the cross and the tomb and the mystery of resurrection.

I recognize that this small practice doesn't stack up against 40 days without food in the desert. There is little discipline or deprivation. But, my prayer is that as we pay attention to the wilderness and listen to our hungers we might encounter God in substantive and even surprising ways.

As our own Keith Starckenberg, in writing about hunger and fasting, puts it this way:

Fasting is about letting our hunger signify our hunger for God. It is about staving off desires for a time in order to become aware of one's own desires. It is about allowing those desires to be questioned. This, in turns, allows our desires to be dilated, to become even larger. When this happens we are more enabled to attend to the God who is always larger than what our desires can manage. We are also more enabled to see others as something other than a service to our desires.

Dear friends, no matter what your wilderness, no matter what your hunger, may we "attend to the God who is always larger than our desires can manage."

For, our hope is not in power....

Turn this rock to bread.

Our refuge is not in prosperity....

I will give you the splendor the nations.

Our comfort is not in the sensational....

Throw yourself down and he will command his angels...

Our hope, our refuge, our comfort is found in the One who entered into the wilderness to restore *shalom*, lead an exodus through death, and set a table that makes room for all.

Even so, come Lord Jesus.

Amen.