

# ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

23 E. Airy Street | Norristown PA 19401 | (610) 272-4092



## WHERE TO FIND YOUR STORY

**The Rev. Andrew F. Kline**

Text of a Sermon preached on the First Sunday of Lent

February 21, 2021

GENESIS 9:8-17 | PSALM 25:1-9

I PETER 3:18-22 | MARK 1:9-15

One of my friends on Facebook retired a few years ago and started driving Uber to make a few bucks and to occupy his time. I admire him because of his habit of volunteering at church and in the community. But mostly I love how he is always looking for ways to help his neighbor. As a part of his retirement gig, he has discovered that he really loves going out of his way to get folks to where they need to go, especially in emergencies.

I also admire him for his dry sense of humor. He made this observation on Ash Wednesday:

“When you get to my age it gets increasingly difficult to find a Lenten fast. It’s harder, you know, to determine what to give up. I don’t eat sweets anymore, or drink, really. Most churches are closed to live services. I already have my schedule of charity activities, so I’m plenty busy there. But wait. Given the forecast, maybe I’ve got it. I’m not going shovel snow anymore! I mean, since the snow won’t stop, I’m putting my shovel down. My snow removal strategy now is called April. I feel closer to Jesus already.”

I had to chuckle. Yes, when you get older, life takes things away from you. And in the midst of this pandemic, the weather is daring us to complain, to start whining. Our pandemic test has lasted a full year. Now a deep freeze? So dear Lord, you are not letting us take our eyes off broken systems, all over this land, not able to deliver power, or vaccines, or the trust needed to open schools for our most vulnerable.

There is simply no need to rush out to the desert to find our test. We already find ourselves knee deep in the wilderness, without our usual guidance systems.

If I had been chatting with my friend, face to face, I would have poked him. Put up or shut up, I would like to say. In my sternest pastor’s voice, I would remind him: “You can always crack open your Bible and go a little deeper. You can always spend some more time on your knees.”

“Don’t let yourself off the hook so easily!”

Perhaps reading my mind, another friend posted on his timeline, fighting irony with irony with just these words: “I remember shoveling snow in April.”

Ha! A living faith requires embracing reality, not withdrawing into fantasy. To have faith is to never give up. There is no way around the work we have to do. The bad news is that indeed the Spirit has driven us out in the wilderness. The good news, if we would crack open our bibles and get down on our knees, is that we would realize that Jesus is out there, out here, with us. But to know that, we would have to know the story.

If I have one suggestion for you as you begin your Lenten journey, create a practice of letting God's word speak to you. Some call it study. Some call it meditation. Some call it quiet time. Some know it as *lectio divina*, an ancient discipline of reading, listening, rereading, and listening again. Almost every child in every family learns it first by calling it grace: the daily moment of reflection we choose to take - or do not choose to take - before breaking bread. Here comes the food. Let's say grace.

But it is more than that. The ancient tradition of praying three times a day helps us learn the prayers we should say especially if we have no meal in front of us. If we have learned to pray three times a day, no matter where we are, we will not be able to avoid reality. We will be more likely to see what we need to see. We would begin to see our story as a part of God's story.

Our Gospel lesson today is a perfect example. It is brief. We have already heard it in church two times in the past two months. "And the Spirit immediately drove Jesus out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him."

Ask yourself, what did Jesus have out there in the wilderness, besides beasts and angels. Jesus is hungry. Jesus is tempted. He didn't have his Bible. He had what the Bible is there to give us: God's story. The story of a people. The story of a people who have a way out of judgement and exile. A story about a God who inverts his bow of wrath and puts a rainbow in the sky, so that every time we see it, we remember that God is for us. The story about the one who will lead us out of our wilderness and help this people fulfill their promise to be a light to the nation.

And you know what, you can find it even in one verse in this passage, in one word. As people were being baptized in the Jordan, Jesus was being baptized "into" it. Deep down, completely immersed. From head to toe, this is one who will identify with Israel, who identifies with each one of us.

Where should you begin reading your bible? If you don't want to keep reading in the Gospel of Mark, look for where the wilderness shows up first. Find the Ten Commandments, Exodus ch. 20, or that moment when Jesus went up the mountain, the Sermon on the Mount, St. Matthew ch. 5. Excellent places to start.

10 minutes a day. Three minutes, three times a day. That's all it takes to see something different. That's all it takes to let God speak to your reality. At the crescendo the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." And there is where your story intersects with God's story. Like Mary's did, at the moment of her son's birth. Mary looked around at the angels, the shepherds, the beasts in the manger, and we are told: "And she treasured all these things in her heart."

Let us circle back to my friend. Is his story really the story of an old man who just has to look forward to life dwindling, taking more and more things away from him? Or is his story about putting down his shovel because he is no longer alone, there are angels who can help, there is a community that is called to get the job done.

We may live in a world that has lost its story, but for us who pay attention, the plot turns on ministering angels and rainbows. We who follow Jesus out into the wilderness will find our story again in Israel's story. And if we do it right, we will be the realists, joyfully refusing to run away from reality.

King David could not have poured out his heart and completed his work, if he didn't know the story. He was not shy about claiming it for himself:

"Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions; \*  
remember me according to your love  
and for the sake of your goodness,  
O Lord...

"All the paths of the Lord are love and faithfulness \*  
to those who keep his covenant and his testimonies."

May your journey this Lent be one with this kind of discovery.