

“Get Lost to Get Found”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Congregational Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts
March 6, 2022 – First Sunday in Lent
Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Luke 4:1-13

Have you ever been told to get lost? We all know how much of a pleasant person you are to be around, so it's highly unlikely that this little verbal dagger has ever been thrown in your direction, but perhaps you've heard someone else impolitely being instructed to get lost, as in go away -- far, far away!

Today's scripture lessons tell us of two episodes of people getting lost in this way. The first of our readings from Deuteronomy is a set of instructions given to the people of Israel as they themselves were lost in the wilderness, still journeying to a land that they could call home after meandering through a dry and desolate landscape for some 40 years after escaping from the land of Egypt. The people are instructed to remember their history of getting lost in the wilderness once they have settled in a home of their own and to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God, for though they were lost in their wilderness wandering, it was through being lost that they found themselves as a people of God, as it was only by God's gracious provision for them in removing them from bondage in Egypt and sending them out in the wilderness, where they entirely had to rely upon God, for they were unable to provide for themselves, that they learned to trust in God and God alone for all they needed to survive. It was by getting lost that they became found.

Our gospel reading from Luke tells us of another episode of wilderness wandering. We are told about Jesus getting lost and wandering in a dry and desolate place for some 40 days just prior to beginning his time of ministry. Like his wilderness wandering ancestors, Jesus had nothing to sustain him during his journey but what God provided. As I mentioned in our children's message, he had no tent to provide him shelter; no sleeping bag to keep him warm at night; and no graham crackers, chocolate bars, or marshmallows to roast over the campfire so that he could make s'mores. No, he got lost, way lost, and he had nothing with him on journey and so had to trust in God -- and God alone -- to provide what he needed to survive. This was the whole point of his time in the wilderness, to learn to trust in God alone in that desolate place so that he would be ready to trust in

God alone when he faced the great pressures and difficulties of the ministry that was ahead of him.

When the devil came to him to test him, to trick him into turning from humbly relying upon God alone, and instead to trust in himself, to enrich himself, and to glorify himself instead of God, he rejected these ways of the trickster and these common ways of the world for a better way. He chose instead to rely upon God alone, even in the most desolate of places and in the most desperate of times. And in his steadfast reliance upon God the Creator and Sustainer while being lost, he found just what he needed to prepare him for the difficult road ahead.

Here we are now in the season of Lent, having embarked upon our own annual journey of wilderness wandering, which lasts for 40 days (plus a few Sundays) prior to Easter. This is a time for us, like the Moses-led Israelites and Jesus who came before us, to get lost, to go away to a wilderness place, where we can learn to better trust in God alone and find ourselves becoming better prepared to be faithful on the journey of ministry that lies ahead of us, even when upon that journey we experience trials, temptations, trouble, or testing. We get lost to get found.

So get lost! This Lenten season, get away from that which pulls your attention away from God and what God desires of you. Pay attention to the things in your life that divert your focus from God. Consider how you fill your life with things that entertain or satisfy you in the moment, but ultimately leave you feeling empty and unfulfilled. Maybe Lent is a season for you to give up chocolate, if chocolate is what pulls your attention away from God and what God wants of you, or maybe it is a season to give up some other addiction or distraction that really does pull you away from God. Maybe this Lenten season is not just one of subtraction, but of addition as you add something to your life that helps you better find yourself as God's trusting and humble servant. Maybe you pray more or add another spiritual discipline to your life or commit to engaging in more acts of service or give more generously to meet the needs of others. However you choose to get lost this Lent, be intentional in getting away from the stuff that keeps you from God and adding the stuff that brings you closer to God. And you will find that, in getting away from your normal ways and routines -- in getting lost -- you find God and you find life. Amen.