

February 21, 2010  
Luke 4: 1-13  
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I wonder if Jesus knew when he went into the wilderness to pray that he would be taking the biggest test of his life. The book of Luke is one of two Gospels that give us details of Jesus' trip into the wilderness. John says nothing about it at all and Mark says it all in two lines. Mathew and Luke are the only ones who attempt to record the dialogue between Jesus and the devil. Most of the time we use this passage to concentrate on the temptations Jesus faces, handed to him by the devil; and the result of Jesus saying no to every one of them. But I would like to concentrate today on the idea of being in the wilderness because our theme over Lent will have us wandering in the wilderness making our way back home.

By our sign today you might think we have already arrived but in fact our journey is just beginning. This sign up here, Welcome Home, is the destination. It is here with us today to remind us and assure us that we *will* be welcomed home and a reminder that some of us may reach home before or after others. There is no particular pace to keep; this is not an Olympic race where the first and fastest time will receive gold. This is a very personal journey between you and God; we are but fellow pilgrims on the road.

So what about that wilderness? Some of you may feel like you are in the wilderness right now. All of us have been, or will be, in the wilderness at some time or another in our lives. It is inevitable that our lives are filled with ups and downs. Our wildernesses may take on differing looks, differing events, but they are similar in that they are the places where we will change and grow, like it or not. Your wilderness may come in the form of a hospital waiting room; in the loss of a job; in the separation of a family; it may even come from within with no apparent reason simply emptiness or sadness we have named depression. That time when perhaps we called upon God but didn't feel you received answer back.

These are the times when we literally or figuratively have no food, no power, no control of our lives; barren, empty.

Recently we have heard many stories out of Haiti. One that stands out for me is the group of BC students who went to Haiti on a mission trip to help to improve the lives of some Haitian people. What they found when they got there was a wilderness they were ill-equipped to live in. The earthquake changed the dynamics and the lessons learned were turned around. The Haitians showed the students how to survive in the wilderness of poverty and devastation; a place they have always known but a place these students may have never been. It is likely these students were all from middle to upper class homes; it is likely they came to Haiti with full stomachs and iPods in their ears; well dressed and in good health. They were suddenly thrust into a situation unfamiliar to them; stripped of the "luxuries of home".

Of course the devastation was greater than even the Haitians were used to but the spirit was there. I would argue the Holy Spirit was there in the midst of the disaster. The resilience of the people who have lived in the wilderness for so long was evident in their ability to adapt to their disaster and manage in unthinkable conditions. And in the middle of this wilderness they sang praises to God, for those who had survived, for the souls and families of those who had not and for the strangers who had come to help.

The Haitian people have long been in the wilderness tempted by the world around them – a better life somewhere else, more opportunities in another place for a life with food, and beautiful homes, running water and toilets that flush, tv's and clothing by the closet full. And in those days immediately following the earthquakes the Haitians showed the world around them how to survive; how to live and rejoice in the wilderness.

The sad part about this story is that the cameras could have gone to New Orleans and seen the same thing – people still surviving in unthinkable conditions after Katrina; people still in that wilderness; the cameras could go north to Canada's northern reserves where the people still live in shacks with no running water and little electricity, limited heating and little food.

What do we learn in these wildernesses? I would suggest we would learn a whole lot more in *these* wildernesses than in the wilderness we "create" through Lent. Many of us use Lent to "give up" something. To do with less; things like chocolate, cell phones, tv. Can you imagine? What a hardship for us! I sometimes think we do this rather flippantly and certainly we have made jokes about giving up things we really don't like anyway, like lima beans and exercise.

Perhaps we have not totally grasped the true meaning of Lent. Did you know the English word Lent actually means "spring" a time Barbara Brown Taylor describes as "-- not just a reference to the crocuses pushing their ways out of the ground in the season before Easter, but also to the greening of the human soul--pruned with repentance, fertilized with fasting, spritzed with self-appraisal, mulched with prayer.

The Lenten journey is meant to be a stripping down of the things that distract us from ourselves; the things we place in front of personal relationship. We surround ourselves with outside influences rather than exploring our inner selves. The Holy within us; that place of divine intervention deep within each and every one of us that brings us home to the God centre within us.

This Lenten journey I invite you to strip away the distractions and take some reflective time with God a journey that will truly welcome each of us home.