

Lent 1: February 18, 2024

Welcome, Announcements and Land Acknowledgement

Welcome

- Those present in person
- Those viewing live stream

Announcements

- Thanks to those helping this day: Lynn, Kelly, Jeff, Gwen
- March 3rd Korean food outing

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that we are gathering on the traditional territory of Indigenous peoples. We affirm that settlers have specific responsibilities in the journey of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

We give thanks to Creator, and to those who have stewarded this land for generations. We are grateful for the opportunity to live, work, and worship here, as we witness to the reconciling movement of the Spirit and seek to live into right relationship with our Indigenous neighbours and all of creation.

Psalm 63:1-8 (call to worship)

A Psalm of David, when he was in the Wilderness of Judah.

O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

**I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.
Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.**

So I will bless you as long as I live;
I will lift up my hands and call on your name.

**My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast,
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips
when I think of you on my bed,**

and meditate on you in the watches of the night;
for you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.

*My soul clings to you;
your right hand upholds me.*

Hymn: “Comfort, Comfort, O My People” VT #212

Service of Shadows and Peace Lamp Prayer

Leader: God, on this first Sunday of Lent, we
remember being human: our fragility and
our limitations. We are aware of our need for
re-connection to the One in whom we live,
and move, and have our being.

People: Be with us in the wilderness.

Leader: Forgive us, Lord, when we forget
your abiding love for us and the world.

**People: Help us, oh God, when we become self-centered,
selfish, and cynical. In your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Leader: As we extinguish a candle on our journey to the cross,
we acknowledge that there is much for God to do within
us and beyond us.

Response: “Between Darkness and Light” #808 VT

- Light the Peace Lamp candle as the we listen and sing

Children’s Time: “The King Who Banned the Dark” (Emily Haworth-Booth)

- See audio recording

Children's Song: Magic Penny (Bonnie)
Joys, Concerns, and Congregational Prayer

Congregational Prayer (#983 VT, adapted)

We give you thanks oh God for the love you show us in the quiet of the night as well as through those and the work you have placed in our lives.

Eternal Strength, hold us—you know the frailties with which we: ourselves, our loved ones, the fragile in which world live. Hold us.

Eternal Hope, show us new life. Guide us individually, congregationally, and in our nation.

Eternal Compassion, comfort us in our grief. Be present to all who suffer in body, mind, and spirit.

Eternal Goodness, in our opportunities of employment and volunteering may we see your face in those people you place in our lives. May receive your grace and extend your grace in among all people and places.

May the offerings we receive this day as a congregation extend your ministry among us and beyond us. Amen.

I invite the ushers to receive this mornings offering.

Offering and Offertory

Our New Testament reading comes from the Gospel of Mark chapter 1:

Mark 1:9-13

The Baptism of Jesus

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

And the Spirit immediately cast him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him.

Hymn: "The Glory of These Forty Days" #305 VT

Here we are, the first Sunday of a new leadership format, which also happens to be the first Sunday of Lent. Does that mean suffering; possibly. In the lectionary, the 1st Sunday of Lent always includes the baptism of Jesus and his time with beasts, angels and the wilderness. This year I will consider this story from the perspective of a new leadership format for our congregation. Our “new” format is certainly something different, but not really new. What does that mean?

Of Baptisms

I have a picture in my office. I moved it the other day; not to dust, but to actually move it. Oh, by the way my office has relocated. I have left my nest next by the sanctuary to the fray of the East side—where Vern, Anita and Susanne have set up shop in years past. Do I really want to move? To be honest, no. But my presence near our office assistant, dear Gwen, and the door is required at this time. Sometimes our baptismal vows take us places we would rather not go. But I packed up the family, my books, and made the sojourn into the unknown wilderness “yon Sied”. This detail of my change of office, as relevant and important for the congregation to know as it is, takes me from my story of an ancestral photograph.

My great grand-father, John F. Epp, was baptized into the Bethesda Mennonite congregation of Henderson, NE (USA) sometime in the early 20th century. Like many young men in those days, he became a farmer. They didn't have paid pastors back in that era. At some point, elders of the congregation chose him to be a lay pastor. It was a large congregation, so I think he must have been one of several lay pastors while also trying to farm. Behind the plow, he crafted his Sunday and funeral sermons in German storing the treasures in his heart and mind. At days end he would jot down a few notes for the upcoming service. He did this for 10 years or so, and then he returned to simply being a farmer. Not that a farming life is easy, but what a relief to be shed of those pastoral responsibilities!! I hear quiet “Amen’s” from Anita and Henry, and likely Susanne if she is listening. Baptisms take us places we would not always choose.

This story highlights one of the new aspects in our congregational life going forward, at least for the time being. We have an amazing group of people from the congregation who have consented to preach every now and then. Don Klaassen, Luke Bushman, Brent Guenther, Edna Froese, Geraldine Balzer, Ron Schellenberg, and Anita Retzlaff are all apart of the preaching rotation. These are people who have been identified as individuals who ponder deeply and speak in ways we can hear. I am not certain these people necessarily want to take on this preaching task. They were asked. Upon reflection, they have felt as if this fits with their baptismal

vows as well as their gifts as well as their commitment to this congregation. Into the wilderness, as all preachers, they go.

Of Wilderness and Beasts

It is at this point that I will fall into one of my passions which includes biblical linguistics and the nuances of them. Within Jewish religious thought of the 1st century, there were three different understandings of “wilderness” (מִדְבָּר). 1. It could be pasture land; a large area of land in which oases or cities exist. 2. It could be an uninhabited space; creatures live there but it just isn’t populated. 3. And there is also the desert sense of wilderness—complete rock and sand.¹

Perhaps the wilderness into which the Spirit directed Jesus is one in where oases existed. Wild beasts, after all, lived there. Flocks maybe were feeding there. On the day of atonement, the “scape-goat” for Israel’s corporate sins, was released into the wilderness (Lev 16:10). It was offered, no less, to a demon god named Azazel.² It is comforting to know that Jesus goes there. Perhaps he has conversations with the demons; our demons. After his baptism, maybe he begins to reconcile the best and worst of humanity. Maybe our baptisms will give us courage to strive towards the same. Can we confront our demons and visit with them? Can we trust that Jesus is there to walk alongside of us? Can we? Maybe. God willing. In any case, we know that Jesus Christ has traversed the landscape of our wilderness.

The mention of beasts calls to mind Isaiah 11:6-9 in which we have the peaceable kingdom described as predators and prey coming together. Wolf and lamb live together. Leopard lies down with a young goat. A calf and lion together—no problems. A cow and bear graze together. Wild beasts being reconciled. Maybe this is what God in Jesus Christ was doing out in the desert those forty days. This is tough work, so the angels minister to him.

Of Angels

We must remember from our biblical studies, that angels are linguistically the equivalent as a “messenger”.³ They are sometimes human and sometimes divine, or sometimes humans who bring divine news which brings great joy. There are countless angels out there who are tending our world and people living into their reality of God’s beloved son or daughter. What the angels do in that wilderness is

¹ Brown, Driver, Briggs-- *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press), p.185. See also.... Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr, Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1990), p. 181.

² *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* edited by Bruce Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 69.

³ ἄγγελος in the *The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised*; edited by Harold K. Moulton (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p 2. מַלְאָכִים in the Hebrew; see the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, entry 1068-- pp. 464-465.

“minister”, to deacon (Mk 1:13; διηκόνου), to Jesus. In the midst of people following their baptism, there are angels who minister to those who are in a wilderness of one sort or another. We need to hear these angelic stories. Angels themselves, benefit from being ministered to. Sometimes that can be nothing more than hearing their stories and affirming their ministry. Sometimes we will feel inspired to partner with them.

That brings to our attention another new aspect of our worship time in this changing season. We are going to hear from those serving in our community. For the next little while (at least 40 days) we will include reflections, and sometimes whole services, devoted to those serving. How did this come to be? I blame the Rough Riders. And why not, everyone else does.

This past fall, worship Deacon Don Klaassen and I were half way through a Rough Rider debacle and our pizza when conversation turned to loftier matters. Don said something profound (not unusual for Don), “service is a core value of this congregation. How do we honour that in our worship?” I took some time chewing my pizza cud to consider a response. Maybe let the people share? Don was more agreeable to that than the pizza or the Rough Rider play.

So, that is what we are going to do. Not every Sunday, mind you, but several times a month. Some organizations, like Canadian Food Grains Bank for example, can take a whole sermon slot. Others who contribute small, and yet powerful, acts of ministry may only want three to five minutes or less. More important to me than the length of reflection is that we are hearing about it and affirming it. It doesn't matter to me if one offers this service for pay or from their free time—angelic ministry in the wilderness needs to be highlighted. With that preamble, then, I would invite Kathleen Regier to elaborate upon some of her work in an anxious world. How does service // ministry impact others and the servant?

Kathleen Speaks

Those serving or ministering on behalf of this congregation, or from this congregation—they need our angelic support. Tending one another is critical. I do not often make specific asks of the congregation within a sermon; today I do so. Affirm the guest speakers. Affirm the lay speakers. Affirm those who share about their service in our community. Give your complaints and constructive criticism to me; I can take it. I have heard worse than anything you can offer and I have survived—all apart of my baptismal calling. People need affirmation, especially when serving and otherwise offering themselves publicly. Thank the speaker—at least it wasn't you who needed to fill the pulpit that day; think about that!! Thank them.

Conclusion—of 40 days

I would be remiss if I didn't offer some time frame for all this new and yet old stuff at NPMC. 40 days seems like a logical choice. Noah, family and beasts were in the ark for 40 days. The Hebrews convalesced at various desert oasis' for 40 years. Jesus spends some time with the livestock in the wilderness for 40 days. But here is the catch... When the biblical authors throw out this number of 40, they are really saying for a while.⁴ We will try this for a time and a time and a half, as the biblical book of *Daniel* might say. We will evaluate, certainly. We need to consider how the volunteers, the people, and Patrick are doing. The Church Board will make those checks. Stil, this will be the plan for the next 40, spoken with the biblical sense of the world. We have things to remember as we go into the next season:

- Baptisms takes us places we would not have imagined
- Jesus has gone before us into whatever wilderness we find ourselves; and the wilderness isn't always that bad!
- The wild beasts and demons are there, true, but maybe this will be the place for reconciliation
- Angels, messengers, will minister to us
- We are invited, like Peter's mother in law and the angels of Mark 1:13, to offer ministry to those in the wilderness.

Amen.

Patrick Preheim, pastor of Nutana Park Mennonite Church

Benediction (#928 VT, Hans Denck adapted)

No one can follow Christ in daily life unless they truly know him:

- **May we recognize him and dwell with him**

No one can truly know Christ unless they follow after him in daily life:

- **May we be granted the courage to follow after him**

Amen

Sending Hymn: "I Want Jesus to Walk with Me" VT #306

⁴ Brown, Driver, Briggs, אַרְבָּעִים which is derived from the word for "many" רַבָּה, pp. 70 and 915.

Order of Worship

Welcome and Announcements

Call to Worship: Psalm 63:1-8 *responsive reading*

Hymn: "Comfort, Comfort, O My People" VT #212

Lighting of the Peace Lamp

Service of Shadows: *responsive reading*

Response: "Between Darkness and Light" #808 VT

Children's Time: The King Who Banned the Dark

Children's Song: Magic Penny (Bonnie)

Joys, Concerns, and Congregational Prayer

Offering and Offertory

Scripture Reading: Mark 1:9-13

Hymn: "The Glory of These Forty Days" VT #305

Sermon: Baptisms, Wilderness, Beasts, and Angels

Benediction: (#928 VT, Hans Denck adapted)

Sending Hymn: "I Want Jesus to Walk with Me" VT #306