

## ***Day 15 Devotion***

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.*

Matthew 4:1-11

The wilderness is a hard place to be. Whether we are talking about the literal or metaphorical variety, our instinct is to detour around those places in life that present the very real possibility of pain, heartache, suffering, or temptation. But is it possible, I wonder, that the wilderness might very well be the place where God does God's most important work?

That is what Barbara Brown Taylor sees happening in the wilderness experience of Jesus here in Matthew's Gospel. She writes:

*"It freed Jesus. [...] After forty days in the wilderness, Jesus had not only learned to manage his appetites; he had also learned to trust the Spirit that had led him there to lead him out again, with the kind of clarity and grit he could not have found anywhere else. [...] Anyone who wants to follow Jesus all the way to the cross needs the kind of clarity and grit that is found only in the wilderness."*

By every measure this is a wilderness time in which we are all living. A global pandemic, political violence, economic disparity, and systemic injustice have all collided to cast us out into a landscape unlike any other we have ever known before. It is a lonely, harsh, and often scary place in which we are now living. But what if this time is also one where God is seeking to do some of God's most important work?

Now be clear, I am not suggesting that God manufactures death and destruction and discrimination and pain to somehow "make a point." But I do wonder if maybe God is nonetheless ready to use this wilderness year (years?) to shape us in much the way Jesus' wilderness experience shaped him.

I am thinking especially about the all-important reckoning around issues of race and reconciliation currently happening in our nation. For too long, many people – especially people with white skin like myself – when given the opportunity to dive headfirst into learning and

conversation on these topics have instead chosen to detour, delay, or otherwise avoid at all costs. After all, that is what we do when we bump up against the wilderness, right?

But Jesus shows us another way. He invites us to face this wilderness of our time head on. Facing the wilderness happens when we heed God's call to practice vulnerability with ourselves and others. It happens when we confess and repent of our corporate and individual sin. It happens when we employ empathy while listening to the stories and experiences of people who are not us. And it happens too when we show openness to the possibility that even our most fiercely held preconceived notions and ideas might be (gasp!) wrong.

Embarking on this kind of wilderness work is not easy nor does it happen quickly. In fact, I have to think that 40-days with no food out there in the desert probably felt more like 40-years to Jesus. But nonetheless it is so crucial because no matter how uncomfortable and scary it may feel, this time and space might very well be where God is working to help us manage our appetites, gain clarity, and, most importantly, grow in *trust* that the One who leads us into the wilderness is also the One who will always lead us out.

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*O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending,  
by paths yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage,  
not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*

(Evangelical Lutheran Worship Evening Prayer)

**RESOURCE:** Waking Up White, and Finding Myself in the Story of Race by Debby Irving  
[Waking Up White, and Finding Myself in the Story of Race \(Paperback\) | 44th & 3rd Bookseller \(indielite.org\)](#)