

February 18, 2018

1B Lent

Rev Ken Wratten

Genesis 9:8-17 The rainbow is a sign of the everlasting covenant with God

1 Peter 3:18-22 The flood is baptism prefigured

Mark 1:9-13 Jesus baptized, 40 days in wilderness

Boy Scout oath – On my honor, I will do my best, to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law; to help pothor people at all times; to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight.

Scout law – A scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent. → personal pledges.

A covenant – between two parties, each pledging to do something for the other. E.g., covenant of marriage. Major covenant models from the Bible are; Noah, Moses, and Jesus.

Noah's wilderness journey lasted 40 days; a rain that destroyed everything outside the ark. I expect that during that time he reflected on the new life he would live - if and when he ever saw land again. When he had endured his wilderness time, he was empowered by a new covenantal relationship with God. He and his family were the fresh start of the human race. The sign of the covenant was a rainbow.

Moses led Israel through the wilderness for 40 years – as their old life as slaves of Pharaoh ended, and their new life as the people of God began to form. The sign of that covenant was the set of tablets holding the Law.

When Jesus had received his baptism by water and the Spirit, he was driven into the wilderness for 40 days. It wasn't until this time of dealing with Satan that the empowerment for his new life as Messiah was complete. It was the wilderness experience and the baptism in the Spirit that empowered him. He and God the Father were in a covenantal relationship. The sign of that covenant was his baptism, and the pronouncement from God, 'You are my Son, the Beloved.'

After Jesus' time of testing, the wilderness became a place for him to rest from the crowds, a place where God was present with him in prayer. It may be that the real wilderness had been within himself, and not a location on Google maps; just as it is so often within us.

This reminds me of the Desert Fathers and Mothers of the late second century, who moved into the Egyptian desert. They sought out the physical wilderness, and its physical hardships, to provide a place to look for Christ. They intentionally chose wilderness living, to learn more about God.

From 1st Peter we are told that our own empowerment for new life as Jesus-people comes from our baptism. But I believe there is another important step. I believe the “empowerment” of God’s grace in our life doesn’t get ‘fully activated’ until we make a decision to let God be our pilot. Noah did that. Moses did that. Jesus did that. Paul did that. God offers you and me a covenantal relationship with him. And the sign of our covenant is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

For us Jesus-people, these times in our own wilderness - whether we are pulled into them from inside ourselves, or whether they are outside forces that act upon us - can strengthen us, teach us, and empower us for God’s purpose. When we are in those times, we are probably no more comforted than Noah while the rain fell, or Moses as the people rebelled, or Jesus at another wilderness experience - on the cross.

A deep experience of time in the wilderness happened to me only five years out of college. I hated my job, and quit to move back near my home town, and open an RV business. The timing couldn’t be worse. Six months after starting the business was when severe petroleum shortages hit. No one would buy travel trailers, and the banks wouldn’t finance them. So I had to close the business. I couldn’t find work. We moved into the one room basement apartment at my parents’ house: my wife, two little kids, and me.

One day I sat on the back porch of my parents’ home, asking God “Why”? Why did this happen? Why did God let it happen? Why wouldn’t God fix it? After a half hour of my carrying on, a call came. An employment agency had gotten my resume, and a company wants an interview. The interview changed my life.

As dark as that time was, I learned important lessons that helped me so much to grow: 1) I can’t go back to my childhood. 2) I can survive hard times. They won’t kill me. 3) I learned all about running a business, and the sole proprietor. This wilderness time taught me to trust God to get me through them, when they hit. I learned to pay attention to God being at work.

This season of Lent can be a holy time of introspection on our own wilderness experiences; what (or who) got us through those time; and how God used those times to deepen our relationship with Him.

[Pass out Lenten pocket coins.]

I invite you to keep your coin with you through this Lenten season, and use it as a reminder of your life as a Jesus-person; be deliberate to notice

wilderness times, and times close to God. It is all part of the two-way covenant life we have with God.

I pray that this Lent will be a time of great blessing for you. Amen.