

REFLECTIONS FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT ~ 06 MARCH 2022

The Mount ~ The Residence at Litledale

As we begin our Lenten journey, we are more than aware that we live in Lenten times. We are at a new phase in the COVID-19 pandemic, somewhat uncertain about the way forward, and more conscious of the divisions within our society made starker by the pandemic. This past week received another section of the sixth Assessment Report from the International Panel on Climate Change, entitled *Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, and described by UN Secretary-General António Guterres as, "an atlas of human suffering and a damning indictment of failed climate leadership." We are on the brink of a world war as Russia, without provocation, has invaded the Ukraine, and NATO and the United Nations struggle to find ways to respond and protect the Ukraine and indeed the whole world.

Within Peru, the struggle for political stability continues as pressure increase for a no-confidence vote for the Cabinet and the impeachment of President Castillo. Within Newfoundland and Labrador, the recent Health Accord NL Report outlines a compelling case to improve health outcomes and health equity for the people of the province. In the Archdiocese of St. John's, bankruptcy protection is challenging the people of the Archdiocese around much-loved properties including their cemeteries and around the pastoral approach in these circumstances. Many of us and our family members are challenged with health issues and increasing frailty.

In these Lenten times, the readings in the Liturgy of the Word for the first Sunday of Lent bring us three welcomed messages: (i) the Lenten journey of today is echoed in the Lenten journey in biblical times, (ii) we see more clearly in that Lenten journey that Earth and people are one, and (iii) even within the Lenten journey, Easter is already present.

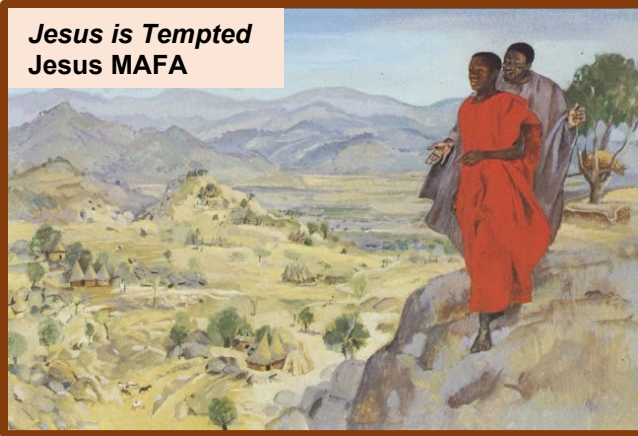
The Lenten journey – the forty-year journey in the wilderness marks the key moment of the Old Testament, the Exodus from Egypt. In the reading from Deuteronomy, Moses tells the story of the intervention of God to save the people from oppression in Egypt, the journey through the wilderness, and the coming to the Promised Land. At the moment of this storytelling, the people have not yet entered the Land, but the time is coming near. In the passage from Luke's Gospel, Jesus is at the beginning of his ministry, has just been baptized and has been named Beloved by God. He immediately goes into the wilderness for forty days (clearly a connection with the forty-year journey of the Israelites in anticipation of the Promised Land). He is tested three times and succeeds in meeting each test. The last verse of the passage reminds us that this is not the end of the testing which will continue until Jesus is crucified.



Jezreel Valley, Lower Galilee

Earth and People as one on the Lenten journey – the story from Deuteronomy begins in the land of Egypt, continues through the wilderness journey, and will end in the entry into the Promised Land. In the telling of the story, Moses reminds the people of their deep and intimate connection with the land. Their roots are in the wandering of their Aramean father (Abraham or Jacob – two distinct traditions) whose descendants do not own the land but are graciously given

it by their God. They are truly strangers in the new land – knowing this, throughout the rest of their scriptures, they realize that they are called upon to link living in the land with compassion for and just behavior towards those “strangers” who dwell among them. Moses calls them to mark their gratitude for the gift of the land by their bringing the first fruits of the land to the altar to return in gratitude to the Lord their God.



In the story in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus is led by the Spirit as he leaves the Jordan River and goes into the wilderness for forty days. This close connection to the land marks the beginning of his ministry. The very first test he is given is to abuse the stones of the land by changing what God meant them to be – the devil tells him to turn the stones into bread. The devil continues this assault on the land by taking him to the highest point of land and offering him control of all the Earth, deceiving him by saying that God had given him that control. Finally, the devil offers him the temple (built by human hands as a place

of meeting between God and the people) and uses the Scripture (a quotation from Psalm 91) as a means of getting Jesus to test God’s goodness.

Easter already present in Lent – one of the most important lessons which today’s readings teach us and one of the greatest supports they give us is the certainty that Easter is already present in Lent, not a time for which we are still waiting. In the telling of the Exodus story in Deuteronomy, Moses (who himself will never enter the Promised Land) speaks as if the people are already in the land, giving them the words to say at the very first time they worship there. He speaks of the future moment as if it has already happened.

In Psalm 91, the psalmist knows that we are always under the protection of our God, “living in the shelter of the Most High, abiding in the shadow of the Almighty” ((Ps 91:1). In the psalm, God responds, “The one who loves me I will deliver. I will protect the one who knows my name” (Ps 91:14). In the reading from Romans, Paul reminds us that there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, that “the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved’” (Rom 10:12-13). And in the story of Jesus in the wilderness, Jesus defeats the devil in each test by using God’s word from his Hebrew Scriptures. Throughout these wilderness journeys, despite the anxieties and tests, God is always present, loving and supportive.

The Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann, says this beautiful prayer for Ash Wednesday which echoes this sense of Easter already present as our Lenten journey unfolds:



Jesus is Tempted, Cerezo Barredo

On this Wednesday, we submit our ashen way to you —
you Easter parade of newness.
Before the sun sets, take our Wednesday and Easter us,
Easter us to joy and energy and courage and freedom;
Easter us that we may be fearless for your truth.
Come here and Easter our Wednesday with
mercy and justice and peace and generosity.

Through all our readings, the word of God is alive and active. Moses re-tells the story from Exodus as the people coming close to the Promised Land, the land of milk and honey. That description of the Promised Land is repeated twenty times in the Pentateuch and the Prophets. Milk comes from mothers – mother goats, mother cows, human mothers. Milk nourishes the young and strengthens all of us in our growing and in our energy. It is a gift of the present and the future. Honey never loses its sweetness; even if it is very old, it still tastes as sweet. It is a gift of our present and our past – a metaphor for the history, traditions, and values that have been passed down since biblical times and continue to nourish us today.



Paul's letter to the Romans tells us, "The word is near you, on your lips and in your hearts" (Rom 10:8). What a beautiful image this is of Scripture that is present in our physical being and in our spiritual being, in the delight of the spoken words and the treasure of the spirit of the words. And remember that today we acknowledge the two books of revelation – the written word of the Bible and the visible word of God in the universe. Jesus uses the spoken words of his Scriptures to defeat the tests of the devil and to protect the created world which is God's gift to us. He challenges the one time the devil abuses the written word of the Scripture to test God.

Jesus comes to his Lenten journey immediately after being called the Beloved One. [Jan Richardson](#) chooses this image to bless us as the "Beloved" – all of us as humans, as other-than-humans, as Earth and as the universe – as we take this Lenten journey to an Easter which is already present among us:

If you would enter into the wilderness,
do not begin without a blessing.
Do not leave without hearing who you are:
Beloved, named by the One
who has traveled this path before you.
Do not go without letting it echo in your ears,
and if you find it is hard to let it into your heart,
do not despair.
That is what this journey is for.

I cannot promise
this blessing will free you from danger,
from fear, from hunger or thirst,
from the scorching of sun or the fall of the night.
But I can tell you that on this path there will be help.



Christ in the Wilderness,
Ivan Kramskoi

I can tell you that on this way there will be rest.
I can tell you that you will know
the strange graces that come to our aid
only on a road such as this,
that fly to meet us bearing comfort and strength,
that come alongside us for no other cause
than to lean themselves toward our ear
and with their curious insistence whisper our name:
Beloved. Beloved. Beloved.

