



Mark 1:12-15; Hebrews 4:14-16

Now that we know what we have—Jesus, this great High Priest with ready access to God—let’s not let it slip through our fingers. We don’t have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. He’s been through weakness and testing, experienced it all—all but the sin. So let’s walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help.

The grace and peace of our Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus be with each one of you.

It is my deepest prayer that these words discover you doing well despite the current Covid 19 outbreak. I am disappointed that we are unable to be with one another during this Lenten season, but I concur that our aim as partners in the journey is to “Do No Harm;” therefore, it is important that we take all the precautions necessary to care for one another and our neighbors. Please know that you are in my constant prayers and thoughts.

Each person here has encountered those moments in life when the despair, desolation, disappointment, pain, and grief have hit you like a “wrecking ball”, and you wonder if you will ever find your way home. You fell through the looking glass, but the world that you fell into is a nightmare of emotions. You simply want to find your way back to the place that came from but no one is listening to your cries.

In C.S. Lewis’ *Prince Caspian*, a child named Lucy encounters Aslan, the Christ-figure of the Narnia stories, after not seeing him for a long while. “Aslan, you’re bigger,” she says.

“That is because you’re older, little one,” answered he.

“Not because you are?”

“I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger.”

Gerald May writes:

“The gentlest form of spiritual narcissism is the idea that one can accomplish one’s own spiritual growth... The belief that ‘I can do it’ is intimately associated with the assumption that ‘it is my idea, my desire, to do it.’ spiritual narcissism works to deny the realization that our spirituality comes from God.”

Wilderness time is a time of complete dependence on God, and then the realization that the deepening of our spirituality is dependent on God. This is such an important part of the wilderness experience. When the people of God were in the Sinai wilderness, God gave them what they needed and God gave them only what they needed for the day. God could have provided at once the manna and everything else the Israelites needed for their wanderings in the wilderness. But, God didn't do that. God gave them only enough for the day. This lesson taught the Israelites not just dependence, but habitual dependence on God. Each new day brought them a new reminder of their utter dependence on God.

Remember that Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread." Jesus was telling us that every day we should acknowledge who the source of everything is. Jesus was telling us to acknowledge every day our dependence on God.

I remember one man and his family in a church I served many years ago. He and his wife had three children, two boys and a young disabled girl with many medical needs. He quite suddenly lost his job and was unemployed for some time. He shared with me that during that time he learned to live daily in a way he never had before. The church as a body and various members of the church individually helped that family for several months as they struggled along. They literally did not know where the next meal was coming from sometimes. Each day was a new day and God provided through the generosity of God's people. I remember he told me that the Lord's Prayer had new meaning for him—for the first time in his life, he really understood what it meant to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread."

God gives us what we need in the wilderness. When our strength, our emotional resources, and other sources of what we need are at an end, then we learn to be dependent on God. God renews our strength, so "[we] shall run and not be weary, [we] shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31).

Christ understands our loneliness and despair. Christ understands the wilderness. Whatever wilderness we find ourselves in, Christ understands. Why? Because Jesus has been there too—in every respect tested as we are.

A few years ago, a Fort Worth Star-Telegram newspaper reporter posed as a homeless man and spent time on the streets. There he came to understand and then to communicate to others the plight of the homeless and the services available to them as well as the needs they have. Because

he experienced what they experienced, he understood in a powerful way who they were and the demands and challenges of their lives. So it is with Jesus. Jesus walked where the outcasts walk. That is part of the message of the cross. Jesus walked where we walk. When it is time for us also to walk the *via dolorosa*, the way of suffering, Jesus walks with us.

In the wilderness times, in times of our greatest need, we will receive strength from beyond ourselves. That strength comes from God.

A boy and his father were walking along a road when they came across a large stone. The boy said to his father, “Do you think if I use all my strength, I can move this rock?” His father answered, “If you use all your strength, I am sure you can do it.” The boy began to push the rock. Exerting himself as much as he could, he pushed and pushed. The rock did not move. Discouraged, he said to his father, “You were wrong, I can’t do it.” The father placed his arm around the boy’s shoulder and said, “No, son, you didn’t use all your strength—you didn’t ask me to help.” (David J. Wolpe, *Teaching Your Children About God* [New York: Henry Holt, 1993], 214).

Wilderness time is time when we must use all our strength—and God is our strength!

May you find the strength and courage of God in the midst of this season of aloneness, but always you remember you are deeply connected to that mystical body of Jesus through the prayers and love of brothers and sisters within the Body of Church, the church.