

February 21, 2010

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MapQuest: Inward Journey-Outward Passion

“Finding Your Path”

Matthew 4.1-11

Is the battle to play it safe or step out of your comfort zones. It's the battle to take the easy way or face what must be faced. It's the battle to choose fear or choose love. It's the battle to settle for less than being who God intends you to be or finding the courage to live life God calls you to.

Oswald Chambers said, “The greatest battles in life are the battles fought every day in the silent chambers of your soul.”

The season of Lent invites us to be very conscious of that inner struggle.

I grew up in northern Minnesota where there are two seasons... winter and July. Just outside my hometown there are dirt roads trucks use to carry taconite from the mines to Lake Superior to be shipped. What happens is that these trucks make huge ruts in the mud that get frozen over and are pretty much permanent year-round. There is a sign on one of these roads that says, “Choose your rut carefully...you are going to be in it for the next 75 miles.” Lent is a time to reflect on our journeys...to look at the ruts we might be traveling in. what would it take to get out of those ruts? What would it take for new life to burst through death?

Our theme for Lent: Inward Journey...Outward Passion. Father Richard Rohr said, “The journey inward...the journey of contemplation and reflection plants the seeds that are harvested in compassionate action in the world.” Our Lenten book and small groups will focus in the outward journey. Our worship themes will focus on the inner journey.

Traditionally on this first Sunday of Lent, the story is remembered and retold of Jesus the story of the inner battle in the silent chambers of Jesus' soul, in the wilderness, tempted by Satan. What if we read this story as a metaphor that might speak to our journeys? We are told the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness for 40 days and nights.

What is your image of wilderness/ my image of wilderness is where I grew up in northern Minnesota...thickly wooded, underbrush, so dense you have to hack your way through...so easy to become disoriented, lost, that you need a compass or a GPS system to find your way.

Where I grew up near Ely, Minnesota there was an Outward Bound Adventure program. It wasn't 40 days but a 28 day wilderness experience, where you learned how to be self-sufficient, how to become more resilient, learn problem-solving skills, face your demons, overcome your fears, find your path and create positive change in your life. Sort of what the journey of Lent is intended to be.

It is being willing to trade the comforts of a strong, dry, secure house for the challenge of spending 28 days with only a few millimeters of flimsy nylon between your body and the wind and the rain, the bears and cold. It is being willing to be tested, push limits, explore boundaries, get out of ruts.

The hope is to learn something about yourself and your life that you carry back to the real wilderness of your daily existence...discover something within yourself to help carry you through the desert places of loneliness, despair and alienation... to help you find your true path and not the path you've been seduced to follow.

Henry David Thoreau said, “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could learn what it had to teach, and not, when I come to die, discover that I had not really lived.” (Walden)

It says in our Bible reading today that the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness...there is something really important about being taken out of our comfort zones...out of our ruts.

M. Scott Peck said that when life is confusing, when problems are overwhelming, when life is most uncomfortable, is the BEST time for change because when you are at your most vulnerable is when you discover you can't do it on your own...that you are unable to save yourself...

He wrote, “The truth is that our finest moments are most likely to occur when we are feeling deeply uncomfortable, unhappy or unfulfilled. For it is only in such moments, propelled by our discomfort, that we are likely to step out of our ruts and start searching for different ways or truer answers.”

Speaking of being uncomfortable, the real test of the Outward Bound experience is the 3 day “solo”. Each person is dropped off on their own island, alone with a tarp, six matches, a pamphlet on edible plants, a piece of string, a tin cup, a knife and a safety pin. Oh, and your journal and a pen.

Three days later, the staff come back and pick you up for the rest of your trip...or, more accurately, pick up what's left of you. On this “solo”, you get hungry, you get lonely, you get scared. You feel pretty powerless at times. You wonder what's going to happen next and how you're going to deal with it. Talk about being taken out of your comfort zone!

My guess is every one here knows exactly what that kind of wilderness experience is like...

Barbara Brown Taylor says it is in the wilderness that we discover what our pacifiers are...what are those habits, substances, surroundings, lies that we use to comfort ourselves...that we use to block out the pain and fear and uncertainty that are normal parts of being human.

She says without our acquired pacifiers, we are suddenly exposed, like some one addicted to painkillers whose prescription just ran out. It's hard. It's awful. It's uncomfortable.

But, it's absolutely necessary to your spirit to encounter the world without anesthesia...to find out what life is like with no comfort the illusion of security, only God.

She says she is convinced that 99% of us are addicted to something, whether it is eating, shopping, blaming, taking care of other people, being right, or just staying safe and secure. The best definition of addiction is anything we use to fill that empty place inside of us that belongs to God alone.

Tiger Woods on Friday stepped out of his comfort zone, faced a camera and offered a confession and acknowledged he tried to fill that empty space with all the wrong things...for that empty space belongs to God alone.

“That hollowness we sometimes feel is not necessarily a sign of something gone wrong.

It is the holy of holies inside of us, the uncluttered throne room of the Lord our God.”

Nothing on earth can fill it, but that doesn't stop us from trying.

Barbara Brown Taylor says, “Whenever we start feeling too empty inside, we stick our pacifiers into our mouths and suck for all we are worth. They don’t nourish us, but at least they plug the hole.” So, it is no accident that we begin this inward journey of Lent following Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted.

That’s important...this time in the wilderness seems to be an important part of this whole journey.

Fred Craddock says, “Temptation at its deepest level has nothing to do with key Lime pie or chocolate fudge. It has nothing to do with that piece of paper in the pocket that has answers to the test. It has nothing to do with a half pint in the tool chest. Jesus’ great temptation in the wilderness and the temptation we all face every day in the silent chambers of our soul is this – will we listen to that voice of fear that tempts us to settle for being less than the people we were created to be...that tempts us to seek safety and comfort...that seduces us into relying on our pacifiers? Or will we choose love and live the life and follow the path God is calling us to? That struggle is what Lent out to be for us.

C.S. Lewis describes this journey in a famous passage from his children’s book, *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*. In the magical land of Narnia, a young girl is seeking knowledge of the great Christ figure, the Lion Aslan.

She asks her companions, “Is he a tame lion, I mean is he safe.” And the answer comes, “He is not safe, but he is good.” And that’s all I can really tell you about this wilderness adventure. It isn’t safe or tame, but God is good, all the time and can be trusted.

My favorite part of the story about Jesus in the wilderness, after the struggle in the silent chambers of his soul, in the very last verse

it says, “The devil left him and suddenly angels came and took care of him.”

And when Jesus left the wilderness...the path was clear...not easy but clear...May it be so for us.