

Sunday, March 13, 2022

## Pushed into the Wild

(Series: "The Gospel According to Peter")  
(Message Two)

### Scripture:

*The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, <sup>2</sup>as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:*

*"I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way"—*

*<sup>3</sup>"a voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
'Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.'"*

*<sup>4</sup>And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. <sup>6</sup>John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. <sup>8</sup>I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

*<sup>9</sup>At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup>Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. <sup>11</sup>And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*

*<sup>12</sup>At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, <sup>13</sup>and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him. (Mark 1:1-13)*

### Message:

**A Jewish couple were arguing over the name to give their first born. They finally asked the rabbi to come and intercede:**

*"What's the problem?" the rabbi asked.*

The wife spoke first, “*He wants to name the boy after his father, and I want to name him after my father.*”

“*What is your father’s name?*” he asked the man. “Joseph.”

“*And what is your father’s name?*” he asked the woman. “Joseph.”

The rabbi was stunned. “*What is the problem?*”

The wife said: “*His father was a horse thief, and mine a righteous man. How can I know my son is named after my father and not his?*”

The rabbi thought and then replied, “*Call the boy Joseph. Then see if he becomes a horse thief or a righteous man and you will know which father’s name he wears.*”

**The first significant word in Mark’s Gospel is lifted from the first significant word in the Bible: *Beginning*.**

**Genesis 1:1** reads, “*In the beginning, God created...*” **Mark 1:1** reads, “*The beginning of the Good News about Jesus...*” Mark hoped his readers, mostly Jewish, would make the immediate connection: The beginning of creation (the world) and the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. This is not a new story; this is a continuation of the one story of God.

Mark solidifies that connection by then quoting the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah. Mark quotes a passage (from **Isaiah 40**) speaking of the *way* and the *path* – very familiar terms.

The *way* – used often in the Psalms – is a reference, not only to the path we walk on, but to the *way* we walk on the path: i.e., the way we talk, influence, treat one another, raise our children, read, worship, vote, garden, play, dress, eat...

Jesus will later identify himself as *the Way* (**John 14:6**); Jesus is not only *the way* we come to God; Jesus is *the way* God comes to us.

Mark quotes a passage where Isaiah mentions “**wilderness**” as place of **testing**, dependence, and **growth**. In fact, this passage is bookended with “*wilderness*” (the word is found in both **Mark 1:3** and **1:13**). This passage finds John and Jesus in the wilderness.

## **BAPTISM**

**Jesus goes into the wilderness to be baptized by John in the Jordan (Mark 1:9f).** As Jesus is coming out of the water, the Spirit descends on him like a dove and a voice from heaven says, “*You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*” God identifies and claims Jesus as his “beloved Son!” Then, the Spirit descends to empower him for his work of preaching and ministry.

Jesus' baptism is significant. First, Jesus' baptism is an act of **association**; Jesus came to take our place. He came to identify with us in all ways - not only on the cross, but in all of life.

**Hebrews 4:15** – “*We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, we have one who has been **tempted** in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.*”

Second, Jesus' baptism is an act of **anointing** for ministry. This “anointing” is Jesus' official call into ministry; he is anointed with the Spirit. From this moment, Jesus is officially “on duty;” his work lies ahead, his walk begins to the cross.

Third, Jesus' baptism is an **acknowledgment** of Jesus' identity; Jesus' baptism underscores who he is. He is the beloved Son of God!

And finally, Jesus' baptism is an act of **assurance**, an affirmation and encouragement of a Father to his Son; we all need affirmation and reminders we are loved (even God's Son).

**In baptism, God reminds us of who we are, who we **belong** to, how much we are loved and the **name** we wear.**

## **WILDERNESS**

**In our text, the *wilderness* also connects the Creation story and Christ's story.** Jesus “*in the wilderness...being tempted by Satan*” recalls Adam and Eve in the Garden being tempted. Eve says she was *tricked* or *deceived* (**Genesis 3:13**) by Satan who “*was more crafty than any of the wild animals.*” (**Genesis 3:1**).

The snake in Genesis had not yet been cursed to slither in the grass; Paul notes sometimes Satan sometimes appears as “*an angel of light*” (**2 Cor. 11:14**). The heads-up here is that evil doesn't always look like evil...so beware.

But this time, Jesus is not seduced, tricked, or deceived. The Gospel has come!

**The same Spirit who just descended on Jesus in his baptism now sends him (literally, “**drives him**”) out into the wilderness.** This is not a gentle nudge or a “*still small voice*” (**1 Kings 19:12**) advising his conscience; this is the relentless push of God's Spirit.

The *wilderness* is not an unfortunate intrusion or interlude in God's plan. *Wilderness* is an intentional link between Jesus' baptism and Jesus' work.

The Greek translated “tempted” here in **Mark 1:13** can mean *temptation* or *trial*. Both meanings are important to keep in mind. Temptation and testing

bring Christ's identity and Christ's work together to underscore the name he bears.

**Hebrews 2:18** – “*Because he himself suffered when he was **tempted**, he is able to help those who are being **tempted**.*”

### **The wilderness is rich with meaning throughout Scripture:**

Israel passed through the Red Sea; like baptism, they entered the water as people enslaved and emerged on the other side conscious of their new life as God's people.

Then they spent forty years in the *wilderness* for God to **bend**, shape and **mold** them. They learned how to depend upon God, how God cared for them, his will and laws, and how to distinguish between God's covenant will and the demands of other nations' gods.

They learned to experience God without all the frills this world offers; in the absence of all the distractions, God becomes the sole reality with which they have to deal.

When they stepped out of **wilderness**, they entered **promised** land. There was no way to go (physically) from their Red Sea *baptism* to promised land *living* without first going through the wilderness (or desert). Nor is there a way to grow spiritually (baptism to maturity) without spending time in the *wilderness*; we all need to be bent, shaped, and molded so that God can use us in ministry and so we can reflect His name.

The wilderness may be **empty** of vegetation and human comforts, but it is **full** of God.

**In the wilderness, Jesus “was with the wild animals; angels attended him.” (1:13).**

The animals remind us that we are living in the midst of God's creation (it is his world); the angels ministering to our needs picture the original, unspoiled community of created beings. Wild beasts represent the order and raw beauty of creation; the angels remind us of the care and intimacy the Holy Spirit provides. The *wilderness* is a place to encounter God without competing voices.

The desert is not empty; there are wild beasts and caring angels; the *wilderness* provides us with everything God created: visible and invisible, animals and angels.

The *wilderness* allows us to get back to **basics: Creation** and the **God** of Creation. The wilderness is the place where water, food, safety, and God are all we need – and all we have. It is only appropriate that Jesus would enter the desert; he still **walks with us** there.

## TEMPTATION

Knowing a bit about the *wilderness*, note that Satan shows up to tempt Jesus (1:13). Satan comes to **interrupt** and **corrupt** as Eve's serpent did in Eden.

The Greek word for **tempted** here can mean *test* or *seduce* or both at the same time.

**Testing** in our everyday experience is **necessary**. The goal is to pass the test! We test cars and airplanes for safety, fishing lines to see what they'll hold, medicines to see if they work and for their side effects. We test students to see if they are learning something.

Testing is not something we want to omit from life – at least not everywhere. If there is no testing there would be no trust or confidence or assurance.

**Temptation** means to **seduce** or *test with a hostile intent*. The goal of temptation is to trap, to bring someone to ruin. No one welcomes being confronted with hostile, negative pressure to fail. The tempter awakens in us the awareness and ability of our choice to transcend the pressure, circumstances, and heredity and to embrace who and what we will be.

**Jesus experienced both testing and temptation.** God pushes Jesus into the wilderness to be tested; while there, Satan tempts him. In the temptation, Jesus experiences the struggle between God and Satan, between good and evil, between faith and doubt. Jesus perseveres; Jesus does not sin.

Jesus offers his assistance to us: *Let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* (Hebrews 4:16)

Jesus was tested to affirm and illustrate he is wholly committed to God and to us. He invites us to claim his **grace** in the midst of our **wildernesses**...

**Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days.**

The number forty underscores the purpose of the testing. Forty days was considered the time it took for an embryo to mature and take on discernable human form in Jesus' day.

In the Greek world, men had to be forty years old to be considered mature. Moses was on Mount Sinai for forty days where he was instructed in the law. The people of Israel spent forty years (maturing) in the wilderness...

The forty days for Jesus was focused on growth that resulted in maturity. Jesus moves through baptism and forty days in the wilderness and comes out prepared to be God's Messiah and to inaugurate the rule of God's kingdom.

For us, forty days is **graciously** a limited number; it does not stretch out **indefinitely**. When we count to forty, we know there is an end coming. However necessary the *wilderness* is, it is temporary; it is not designed to characterize or last our entire life.

*Wilderness* life is **strenuous** life; it cannot be endured endlessly; grace is offered. God's grace is sufficient. Some have tried to make a permanent home of *wilderness* living; desert life is seldom congenial to serious work. But the *wilderness* is for **preparing**; we cannot always be "**preparing**."

**Wilderness is a time of testing to discover what works and what work we will do.** It is an experience to discover our identity in our baptism; the *wilderness* burns it into our DNA; no part of Gospel life, or Kingdom life, can remain simply an idea.

So here, Peter, with Mark faithfully writing out his message, introduces us to Jesus' incarnated life, a life **just like ours: loved**, tested, tempted, prepared, and **sent** to minister.

Jesus' humanity is a gift of God's grace. Our humanity is a gift of God's grace. We are to grow up into him whose name we bear – the name of Christ.

### **...PUSHED INTO THE WILD...**

**Note the unpredictability of life and faith.**

We spend a lot of our time and effort trying to make life **comfortable** and **predictable**. We define success as having security and comfort along with minimal risk. We train our children how to make a living (to pick the right career, right schools, right neighborhoods), but often neglect to teach them how to live.

We do the same with our faith. We want a god we can box and define so life will be safe and have some predictability.

But **faith** and **predictability** are not designed to co-exist together.

A little girl came home from Sunday School. Asked what she learned, she said, "We talked about bees. God made the bees; Satan made the stingers."

If only life were that simple. Life is **messy**. God doesn't conform to our image. *Predictable faith* is an **oxymoron**. **Jesus** was far from predictable and safe. He ate at the wrong houses; hung out with harlots, thieves and scoundrels; broke traditions; and irritated the religious establishment (cf. **Mark 2**).

He didn't fit people's idea of what *god* should do or religion should look like. He was rejected because he was not predictable and safe. He disrupted their

comfortable patterns of life. He would go into a town, do a miracle, and be asked to leave. Amazing!

The way of Jesus is the way of the **wild**erness. Jesus left the safe places. Rather than join us, Jesus invites us to join him.

After Jesus' testing and temptations in the wilderness, he sees Peter (and Andrew) fishing on shore! (The shore is a safe, comfortable, low risk place to fish) **(1:16f)**

Jesus: *"Guys, you'll never be what God wants you to be if you always hang out where's it safe. Come with me to deeper, riskier waters; fish with me for people!"*

We grow most in times of **adversity** and crisis (in the *wilderness*). We don't grow when we're comfortable. When we're comfortable we tend to stay put. When we are full, we nap; when we're hungry, we go searching for food.

The way of Jesus is never the **easy** way. It means transformation, sanctification, risk and trust; it is the way of the *wild*.

Our world is not a safe place: nations bombing schools and hospitals, students killing students, domestic violence, road rage... We need to be prepared and adequately prepare our children to live here in this world. We need to baptize them and train them. Then comes the day when they're "pushed out" into the *wilderness*. The Good News is lived out in **dangerous** places.

**Note the **passion**, the hunger, that is required.**

What is the most critical issue for Christians today? (Probably not what you'd think). For college students, most people think it might be alcohol, drugs, or sex; actually, it's "lack of sleep."

For Christians, Mike Yaconelli says, *"It's not abortion, pornography, moral absolutes, the disintegration of the family, drugs, racism, sexuality or lack of school prayer. The critical issue today is dullness."*

We say we're committed to Jesus. A dead man literally **walked out** of his **grave**! Talk about a reason to get excited; talk about a movement to commit your life to. Here it is!

God wants to create a **passionate** tension in our hearts, a holy **discomfort**. The Christian life offers **comfort**; but it is never **comfortable**. Passion begins in our heart, but it can never just stay there; faith demands we step out into the wild and live boldly in a world of discomfort and uncertainty.

**Later in Mark, John will ask Jesus if he is the **Messiah**. Jesus responds: "**I am!**"**

Jesus adds: “*But, John, I’m not going to open the door of your uncomfortable prison cell. I didn’t come to make this life safe; but I will be with you always in the midst of the wild, the uncomfortable, and even death.*”

John never left prison. He was beheaded. Following Jesus **cost** John his **life** – but then, it wasn’t his, he had **already given** it to **Jesus**. Take **courage**! Because being a follower of Jesus means **doing** the things Jesus **did**...including spending time in the *wilderness*.

So whose name do you bear? Which **father** do you look most like? It is our life that *earns* the name; it is not the name that creates the life. To call yourself a child of God is **one** thing. To be called a child of God by those who are **watching** is an entirely **different** thing.

©Dr. Douglas Kamstra  
Covenant CRC  
7171 Willard Ave. SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49548