

Kuhn Memorial Presbyterian Church
955 Main St.
PO Box 222
Barboursville, West Virginia 25504
Third Sunday in Lent
March 7, 2021

Prelude

Call to Worship

Lent calls us to journey, this and every day,
following Jesus wherever he leads us.

Lent calls us to journey:
to the place God covenants with us,
to receive the new life we are given.

Hymn There Is a Redeemer Text and Music: Melody Green 1982

1 There is a redeemer, Jesus, God's own Son,
precious Lamb of God, Messiah, Holy One.

Refrain:

Thank you, O my Father, for giving us your Son,
and leaving your Spirit till the work on earth is done.

2 Jesus, my Redeemer, name above all names.
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah, hope for sinners slain. Refrain.

3 When I stand in glory, I will see his face.
There I'll serve my King forever in that holy place. Refrain.

Prayer of Confession

God of mercy,
you sent Jesus Christ to seek and save the lost.
We confess that we have strayed from you
and turned aside from your way.
We are misled by pride,
for we see ourselves pure when we are stained,
and great when we are small.
We have failed in love,
neglected justice,
and ignored your truth.
Have mercy upon us, O God, and forgive our sin.
Return us to the path of righteousness
through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Response Take, O Take Me as I Am Text and Music: John Bell, 1995

Take, O take me as I am.

Summon out what I shall be.

Set your seal upon my heart and live in me. Repeat.

Assurance of Forgiveness

Who is in a position to condemn?

Only Christ,

and Christ died for us,

Christ rose for us,

Christ reigns in power for us,

Christ prays for us.

Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation.

The old life is gone; a new life has begun.

Know you are forgiven and be at peace. Amen.

Old Testament Reading Psalm 32 The Joy of Forgiveness

Of David. A Maskil.

¹ Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.

² Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

³ While I kept silence, my body wasted away
through my groaning all day long.

⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

Selah

⁵ Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not hide my iniquity;
I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD',
and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Selah

⁶ Therefore let all who are faithful
offer prayer to you;
at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters
shall not reach them.

⁷ You are a hiding-place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.

Selah

⁸ I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

⁹ Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle,
else it will not stay near you.

¹⁰ Many are the torments of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD.

¹¹ Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

Gospel Reading Matthew 4:1-11 The Temptation of Jesus

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' ⁴But he answered, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."' '

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you", and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."' '

⁷Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."' '

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; ⁹and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' ¹⁰Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! for it is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."' '

¹¹Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

The Message for March 7, 2021 Lent 3

Let's set the scene: The inhabited part of Judea stood on the central plateau which was the backbone of Southern Palestine. Between it and the Dead Sea there stretched a terrible wilderness, thirty-five by fifteen miles. It was called Jeshimmon, which means "The Devastation."

The hills were like dust heaps; the limestone blistered and peeling; the rocks were bare and jagged; the ground sounded hollow to the horses' hooves; it glowed with heat like a vast furnace and it ran out to the cliffs, which were about a thousand feet high, then swooped down to the Dead Sea. It was there that the Spirit led Jesus, where he stayed for forty days and nights and was tempted.

Who has encountered such a scene? Maybe you've been to the Holy Land and have witnessed this yourself. Or maybe you've hiked the Rockies. Maybe you ventured into the desert of the American Southwest that glows with the sun.

Or maybe the wilderness you encountered was an illness, a broken relationship, a lawsuit, trouble in school, moving across the country, or deployment in service to our country. Or something else.

We have all experienced something of the wilderness. We have been tested and tried and worn. We may have even been tempted by evil. These are ways that we can identify with Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us.

Sometimes our wilderness wandering leads to disaster. Other times, it can lead to new life and that's what I want to share today.

Joe and Mary met in the kitchen of a mutual friend on the night of a New Year's party. They were cleaning up, bagging trash and washing dishes, because they got bored with the small talk in the living room. They just regular talked and found they had some things in common. They both liked to hike and they both enjoyed gourmet cooking. Joe invited Mary to join him on a hike when the weather warmed up in the spring. Mary said she'd love to but he should know that she has an 8 year old son and doesn't normally leave him with a babysitter for a whole day. He was welcome to change his mind. Joe surprised himself by saying, "No problem. Bring him along."

Now, this was unusual because Joe had no children and he wasn't sure he even liked kids. Now, he had just committed to spending a whole day with one.

So, on a clear day in March, Joe, Mary and Josh drove to the Red River Gorge. Typically, Joe would hike along the ridges, but he worried about taking a little boy up where there were steep drop-offs. Instead, he took them on Rock Bridge Trail down to a beautiful waterfall. Long enough and a little challenging for an 8 year old. The trail's turnaround point at the falls was a perfect place for the picnic lunch Joe had packed.

The weather cooperated, cool and clear, with some of the trees just beginning to bud. Joe had hoped to see deer along the trail, but, the hikes he normally took were solitary and silent. Today's hike was different, thanks to his companions and the running conversation. Joe found he really didn't mind. Josh brought lots of energy and enthusiasm to the day.

Josh had been hiking many times with his mom. He shared with Joe the three rules his mom had taught him for being in the woods:

Rule one: Stay together no matter what.

Rule two: Watch the light. The direction of the light helps you figure out where you are.

Rule three is to mark the important parts of the trail. That's how you know where you've been and it will help you find your way home.

So, at a couple of places on the trail, when they made a turn, Josh built a cairn of rocks as other hikers had done before them, so they would remember the spot and know which way to turn when going home. Josh loved building cairns and Joe enjoyed helping him find just the right rocks, flat and smooth.

And that was the day Joe fell in love with Mary and Josh. Joe couldn't go to sleep that night. Loving someone was terrifying. He was not very good at it, according to his ex-wife. And it was complicated. Josh was looking for and needed a father. His father hadn't been in the picture for over five years. Joe had no experience with children and Josh had needs and expectations as all children do. He needed a lot of love and support and guidance. Would Joe measure up? Would he fail at this relationship, too?

But, Mary and Josh had fallen in love with Joe, too. And from that first spring day, the threesome spent nearly every Saturday together, doing ordinary things like making grilled cheese sandwiches, cleaning the garage, and playing in the park.

This time of wilderness wandering has led to change for all of them. Joe thinks about Josh when making choices about almost everything. Which trails to hike, what television shows to watch, how to spend his money, are all influenced by the boy who now calls him, "Dad." It isn't always easy or fun or cozy. Life can be complicated, as we all well know.

Joe goes to bed earlier these days, because Josh wakes early. On Saturdays, they let Mary sleep in while they eat Honey Smacks on the sofa.

Joe doesn't work 65 hours a week anymore. He turned down a promotion that would mean moving to a distant city. In these early days of life as a family of three, he wouldn't even consider moving Mary and Josh from the job, school and friends they loved.

Joe's interests have changed so much. He actually takes time off a couple of times a month to have lunch with Josh at his school. He took a whole day off to go to the pumpkin patch with the third grade class in October. He's quite popular with all the kids because most of the dads can't show up during the school day.

When Christmas came along, Joe wanted to choose the perfect gift. After all, this whole family celebration thing was a novel experience. So, he rented an RV, not to be used in December, but in the spring. Joe presented Mary and Josh with colorful guide books to state parks so they could all plan a trip together. They were delighted just thinking of the hiking and camping and fishing and campfire-building ahead of them.

And then there was Josh's gift to Joe: three washed rocks. He had collected them out of a local creek and washed them, scrubbing them in detergent and bleach water with a brush.

“It was hard work,” Josh explained. Three smooth rocks of decreasing size, scrubbed to a shiny gleam. “I know how you love to hike, and I hoped this would remind you of some of the fun hikes we’ve taken.”

Joe was unable to speak. He gave Josh a huge hug and they built a little cairn under the Christmas tree.

Mary, Joe and Josh have experienced deep transformation over the past year. It has been full of new understanding and growth. Sometimes they feel like their hearts are being expanded. Memories are piling up like stones, each one fresh and meaningful. And sometimes hard.

Sometimes we choose to venture into the unknown. We prepare for it. We anticipate the problem spots and we go prepared.

Sometimes we wander aimlessly, running low on food and water, and make it home by the skin of our teeth.

Sometimes we lose our way.

Remember the rocks. They are not bread to be plundered by the wind, the rain or the wildlife.

Picture the stones, one atop the other.

One reminds us to stay together. One reminds us to watch for the light. And one reminds us to mark the important turns on the trail.

Prayers of the People and the Lord’s Prayer

Gracious and loving God,

We thank you for walking with us during these days of wilderness-walking and uncertainty.

Remind us that though our circumstances change daily due to weather, Covid, and other factors, you remain unchanged, ever-present and ever loving.

As Spring comes closer and the sun lengthens our days, awaken our hope in your promise of new life.

This day we pray for all those struggling to put their lives back together following recent storms and all the damage they caused. Comfort those who have lost their homes and belongings. Bring solace and peace to those who have suffered the loss of loved ones.

We pray for this community and our nation and other nations. May all who lead from positions of power, be inspired by your wisdom, compassion, and courage.

We pray for innocent victims of violence and hardship of any kind. We pray for the little girl, and all children in harsh situations, whose sobs interrupted her virtual school classroom because she was suffering from hunger and poverty. Help us identify children and others in these circumstances and make the way clear to relieve them of their distress.

We pray for those closest to us who are in any kind of illness or distress, for those who have endured loss, including the loss of loved ones.

We pray for our church and its leaders as plans are made to return to the building for worship. May you give us all an extra measure of patience and optimism to cope with our challenges and embrace our opportunities. We pray as Jesus taught us saying, Our Father...Amen.

Blessing

Go now and live in the spirit of your baptism,
even when you are led into wild and hard places.
With repentance and trust, give yourselves to God,
and with fasting and prayer,
strengthen yourselves against the ways of the tempter.
And may God enfold you in tender and lasting love.
May Christ be beside you in times of struggle.
And may the Spirit guide you whenever you stray.

Postlude