

Daily Office Devotional, Monday, January 11, 2021
The week of the first Sunday after the Epiphany
The Rev. David W. Perkins, Th.D.

Daily Office Lectionary Readings

AM Psalm 1, 2, 3; PM Psalm 4, 7

Isa. 40:12-23; Eph. 1:1-14; Mark 1:1-13

Morning Prayer, Rite 2, page 75, Book of Common Prayer

Evening Prayer, Rite 2, page 115, Book of Common Prayer

Compline (Night Prayer), Page 127, Book of Common Prayer

Daily Office Gospel Reading, Mark 1:1-13

1:1 The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;

3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,”

4 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He proclaimed, ‘The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11 And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’ 12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

David's Reflections

Bruce Springsteen devoted the pop album, "The Rising" to themes relating to 9/11. One of the songs, "Further On," has these lyrics.

"Now I been out in the desert, just doin' my time.
Searchin' through the dust, looking for a sign.
If there's a light up ahead, well brother I don't know.
But I got this fever, burnin' in my soul.
So let's take the good times as they go,
And I'll meet you further on down the road."

Springsteen's words capture something of the essence of this passage. Like John, he feels like someone traveling through a wilderness, someone in exile looking for meaning. The fever for meaning burns in his soul.

John came to prepare the way for Jesus' coming and quoted a passage from Isaiah about God delivering the captives through the desert by preparing a highway for their journey, as God did for the Israelites led by Moses. John was preparing the way for Jesus who would deliver the captives.

The wilderness has symbolic significance as a place of evil and desolation, a place of divine absence. Yet, John came in that very wilderness, inviting people to an attentive expectation that God was going to act in the wilderness to end their wandering and exile.

If you find yourself in a wilderness moment, doubting that a light awaits up ahead, today's Gospel says you are not really alone in that wilderness. God is at work there. Jesus himself understands the wilderness; he has fretted there in hunger and thirst, under attack by the powers of evil. No wilderness in which we wander puts us outside his loving care. Christ has been there and will be there with us, enduring the wilderness moment, bracing our hearts against the forces that would mislead and destroy us there and leading us through.

Do you find it astounding how the biblical texts take on new significance in our changing contexts. Read today's Gospel in light of the COVID19 pandemic and our struggles to maintain sanity and persevere with life's basic challenges in the face of the constant threat of infection and the debilitating effects of the anxieties generated. It's quite easy to sense the wilderness nature of this moment.

In that wilderness moment, could it be that we are there for the same reason Jesus was? The Spirit of God took Jesus there. Could it be that our wilderness moments has taken us into a sparse, empty space, a space that God uniquely can share. And, a space that God can share without filling. The emptiness and desolation may abide, but God abides there, too. How counterintuitive to struggle in the wilderness yet have heightened expectations of a unique encounter there with the divine.

Collect of the Day, First Sunday after the Epiphany: The Baptism of our Lord

Father in heaven, who at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit: Grant that all who are baptized into his Name may keep the covenant they have made, and boldly confess him as Lord and Savior; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.* (BCP, 214)

A Collect for the Renewal of Life

O God, the King eternal, whose light divides the day from the night and turns the shadow of death into the morning: Drive far from us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep your law, and guide our feet into the way of peace; that, having done your will with cheerfulness while it was day, we may, when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, 99)

Of the Holy Trinity

Almighty God, you have revealed to your Church your eternal Being of glorious majesty and perfect love as one God in Trinity of Persons: Give us grace to continue steadfast in the confession of this faith, and constant in our worship of you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; for you live and reign, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.* (BCP, 251)

A Prayer for Light

O Lord God Almighty, as you have taught us to call the evening, the morning, and the noonday one day; and have made the sun to know its going down: Dispel the darkness of our hearts, that by your brightness we may know you to be the true God and eternal light, living and reigning for ever and ever. *Amen.* (BCP, 110)

A Collect for Mission

O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent your blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near: Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you; bring the nations into

your fold; pour out your Spirit upon all flesh; and hasten the coming of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, 100, 257)