



Bringing Home the Word †

First Sunday of Lent February 22, 2015

Desert Time

By Janel Esker

As a Midwesterner in the middle of winter, I must admit that thoughts of the desert are pretty appealing right now. But in Scripture, the desert isn't a welcoming place. Mark's description of the desert Jesus entered is characteristically succinct, but it clearly doesn't appear to be a place of hospitality. Wild beasts, Satan, loneliness—particularly in Jesus' day, the desert wilderness wasn't an exotic locale for *Survivor*-like reality shows but a

place of profound testing and challenge.

Many of us have experienced desert times. In a time of career discernment, we may feel unclear about our next move. In a time of serious illness, we may question our life's focus. In a relationship crisis, we may find our trust in a beloved companion to be shaken.

If we survive desert time, we often emerge changed, with a deeper sense of direction. We may even have a new focus or a new mission.

On coming out of his desert time, Jesus' initial words were urgent and focused: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." He emerged with a fervent commitment to spreading the news of God's kingdom.

This Lent, we're invited into the desert to reflect on how we most need God to shake us up, draw us away from sin, and call us into new ways of life. Jesus came out of the desert proclaiming the reign of God; as we come out of the desert at Easter, how will we be changed and ready to advance God's kingdom? How might we allow God's transforming grace to call us into a new mission? †

Sunday Readings

Genesis 9:8–15

God promises Noah and "every living creature" never to destroy the earth by water again. God sets the rainbow in the sky as a sign of this covenant.

1 Peter 3:18–22

God's salvation of Noah's family in the flood foreshadows our salvation through baptism in Christ, who suffered once to redeem all sin.

Mark 1:12–15

Jesus entered the desert and was tempted by Satan for forty days, after which he proclaimed the kingdom of God across Galilee.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What does it mean to live a covenantal life?
- What do I plan to work on during Lent?

PRAYER

Lord, strengthen my
resolve to be faithful
to your covenant and
my baptismal promises
and be more loving
toward all people.

—From *Mindful Meditations
for Every Day of Lent and Easter*,

Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney

Our Hunger for God's Word

By Paige Byrne Shortal

Every year on the first Sunday of Lent, we hear about Jesus going into the desert and arguing with the devil. One of my sons, upon hearing that Jesus was offered the power to turn stones into bread, mumbled under his breath that Jesus should have taken the deal. I was shocked—not so much at what he said but that he was listening at all—and asked him to explain. He said, in that voice reserved for parents and idiots, that there is a lot of hunger in the world. Point well taken.

What *would* have been so wrong with taking the deal? *Three times* Satan offers Jesus power. First, power over hunger: A man who can turn stones into bread need never be hungry again. He could feed all those little children whose faces haunt us, extending their bowls for their one poor meal a day.

Second, power over the kingdoms of the world: This is the power we long for when we say, “If I were the president...,” “If I were the pope...” Think of how much good we could do!

Third, power over death and suffering: Don't we all seek this power in some way?

Jesus' response is always the same: *God is my only God*. The devil's way is to do big things in a big way. God's way seems to be to do the next little thing—to feed the one person placed on our path, to do the good it is in our power to do, to accept the powerlessness of suffering and death (even death on a cross!).



The sustenance of the disciple is the word of God. We are to devour it as a hungry child devours bread. We are to listen to the Gospel like passengers stranded at an airport straining to hear any announcement of how and when they'll finally get home. I don't listen to the Gospel like that. I listen to the Mass readings as I do the stories of a garrulous old uncle—outwardly polite but thinking of other things—because, no offense, I've heard this story before. Or have I?

A fifth-grade girl heard the parable of the sheep and goats and Jesus' identification with the poor—what we do for the least ones, we do for him. Her startled response was, “Do other Catholics know about this?”

I need Lent. I need the desert of quiet where I can hear God's word like I've never heard it before...and maybe make a meal of it. †

Adapting to Change

By Paige Byrne Shortal

I hear a siren and I think, “Someone's plans just changed.” Our lives are not what we thought they'd be. Our plans give way, and often we resist. Sometimes I wonder how much pain and evil is in the world simply because people aren't willing to change.

A woman finds herself pregnant, and she wants to finish school first or has “enough” children already. We lose a job or don't get the promotion we wanted. Or the test results come back, and they aren't good. Do we find our way to acceptance or reject God's plans and pine away at what might have been? A dying friend once confessed, “Cancer saved my life.” I've thought often about the brilliance of his insight, the graciousness of his surrender.

Lent has begun. When I was younger, Ash Wednesday would find me making promises I couldn't keep. Now I know that the best Lenten practice for me is to renew my attempt to find God in all things—in every change of plans.

Five years ago, my husband and I became the guardians of our three grandchildren. Of course, we could have declined. We were both anticipating a quiet retirement. But as I sit here writing with my granddaughter doing her homework beside me, I see the only treasure worth having—the one we find when we say yes to God's plan for us. †

WEEKDAY READINGS February 22–28

Mon. *St. Polycarp: Leviticus 19:1–2, 11–18 / Matthew 25:31–46*
Tue. *Isaiah 55:10–11 / Matthew 6:7–15*
Wed. *Jonah 3:1–10 / Luke 11:29–32*

Thu. *Esther C:12, 14–16, 23–25 / Matthew 7:7–12*
Fri. *Ezekiel 18:21–28 / Matthew 5:20–26*
Sat. *Deuteronomy 26:16–19 / Matthew 5:43–48*