

Study Guide **February 18, 2018**

Theme: **Journey to the Wilderness**

Readings: Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 25:1-9; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15

We begin the first week of Lent by looking at the covenant promises of God; the first with Noah and the last with Christ. Unlike a contract (a legal way of coming to an agreement), a covenant is not broken when one party walks away from what was agreed upon. In other words, no matter our failure to keep our end of the deal God's word remains faithful. As the psalmist points out, "All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness for those who keep his covenant and his decrees."

Lent is a time the Holy Spirit takes us, still dripping from our baptismal waters, out into the spiritual and actual wilderness of life. Out there we are faced with temptation and the wild beast that want to devour us (tons of metaphors come to mind). We can use our 40 days to be afraid or we can use our time to be with God who is with us, just as God's angels were there for Jesus, caring and serving him so he could remain focused on what God was doing.

Lent is a time to fast. But it is also a time to feast. We need spiritual refreshment and joy in our lives. So do not forget to feast on the gifts of God's steadfast love and faithfulness to get through the journey. Remember, Jesus has gone there before you, and will be there with you to get you through both the good and the bad moments you might endure. He might lead you down difficult paths, but he will not lead you astray. That's God's promise.

Read: Genesis 9:8-17; 15:1-6; 17:1-13

Since the time of humanity's disobedience in the Garden, covenants have been the means by which we re-enter into relationship with God. It's important to note that God's covenant extends past Noah through his descendants, to all of creation. This shows a significant point about the grace of God: it extends beyond all sense of righteousness on our part. God's faithfulness to his covenantal promises is a theme that runs throughout Scripture and unites us all to the likes of Noah, Abraham, and Jesus.

Q: What particular verse or word stood out to you?

Q: How do you understand God's grace, and how do you rectify it with our understanding of justice? (Is it fair that others benefit by Noah's righteousness)

Read: 1 Peter 3:18-22

1 Peter exposes the new covenant under which God calls the unrighteous to himself. Just as God's covenant with one righteous man, Noah, extends his grace to all; the new covenant, by which we are now being saved, extends that grace even further. The promised faithfulness of God is fully realized in Jesus Christ, who now sits at the right hand of the Father. By baptism, we are initiated into Christ's body and given a righteousness that we cannot attain in and of ourselves. By baptism, we die to ourselves and are resurrected to a new covenant and a new relationship with God.

- Q:** As you walk through your Lenten wilderness, can you identify the sins that keep you from living fully into your new spiritual life?
- Q:** What are the things you feast on in your daily life to bring joy in your time of struggle and suffering?
- Q:** Can you think of ways you can proclaim the good news to others who are also still imprisoned by their selfishness and sinfulness?

Read: Mark 1:9-15; Matthew 3:13-4:11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:29-34

Mark's narratives of the baptism of Jesus, his temptation in the wilderness, and the commencement of his ministry are the sparsest of all the Synoptic Gospels. But his no-frills retelling of these three events, in short order, reveals their deepest truths. The baptism of our Lord stands as a significant transition from who we "were" to who we "are," as God gives us new life. Our baptismal water is an outward sign of an inward promise of our covenant we make with God. Each gospel gives a different account. PLEASE read each one carefully and see if you can spot the subtle differences and omissions. With a handful of verses in Mark's gospel, we are given insight to what it truly means to be God's beloved Son – to endure a baptism of repentance, which he does not need; to face the temptations that are part and parcel of human flesh, so that he may know our plight; to be waited on by those who are closest to God, in order to bring a message of good news to those who are furthest from him. To be a beloved is to live a life for others, in order that they might live the life that God intended.

- Q:** What are some differences you see in the four gospel accounts? What's similar? What is missing? Where does the action lead to next?
- Q:** If Jesus is the Son of God, and does not need a baptism of repentance, what might be his purpose for being baptized? And what does it mean to you?
- Q:** How are you being tempted today? Have you called on God's angels to protect you?

Slow Read: Psalm 25:1-9

This portion of Psalm 25 expresses the contrasts between God's way and the ways of humanity. As you read and reflect on these words, think about where God is leading you. Or what you need to surrender in order to follow.

Prayer: God of covenant grace, bring me closer to you during my Lenten journey. Prepare my heart and soul for silence and solitude so I may discover your desire for me. Strengthen me by your Spirit so I may fast from my sins and feast on your faithfulness and grace given to me by your beloved Son. Help me today to be more like him and less like me. Amen.