

**The Reverend Marjo Anderson**

**Lent 1  
Mark 1.9-15**

**21 February 2021  
Salem, Bridgeport**

**“Driven into the Desert to Discuss, Discern and Discover”**

What an incredibly short gospel – three sentences on Jesus’ baptism and two on his temptation!  
So why do we make of today’s lesson?

Well Jesus is 30 years old at this point and apparently has done nothing of significance –  
other than astound some teachers in the temple when he was 12 years old.  
He’s come to hear his cousin John preach and John ends up issuing an invitation to people –  
to repent, to turn their lives around, to stop being who they were and to become something more.  
Something in that invitation causes Jesus to step into the water  
and as he comes up from the water he finds what he was seeking.

He sees the heavens torn open,  
he sees the Spirit coming down on him like a dove,  
he hears God say, “You are my beloved child and with you I am well pleased”,  
he feels the spirit enter him.

It was a whole body experience – sight and sound and feeling.

And then immediately – immediately – the Spirit drives him out into the desert.  
No food, no water, no change of clothing, no tent, no weapon to protect himself from wild beasts or robbers,  
no cell phone, no laptop for zoom meetings, no contact with anyone.

So why did the Spirit drive him out into the desert alone?

Have you ever had someone close to you and you’ve seen in that person unrealized potential?  
Maybe it’s somebody who has brilliant ideas but can never get anyone to buy into them  
because she’s a terrible salesperson.  
Maybe it’s someone who has the potential to advance in their career,  
but lacks the confidence or the commitment to move ahead.  
Maybe it’s someone with great potential but who suffers from mental illness or substance abuse  
that keeps pulling the rug out from under them.

And of course no matter how you try to help  
and no matter how you try to communicate this amazing potential that you see in them,  
they just keep getting in their own way.

Of course that’s the story for all of us.  
God has given us each amazing, phenomenal powerful potential,  
and no matter how well or how poorly we do in life, there remains always untapped potential.

I think that’s the main reason that the Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert –  
so that God would have time to help Jesus see what God saw in him.

And how can that happen?  
How could Jesus’ eyes and ears and mind and heart and spirit be opened up to see the potential inside him?  
How can our eyes and ears and minds and hearts and spirits be opened up to see the potential inside us?

I think today’s lesson tells us.  
It takes time alone with God, time away from all the other things that tell us who we can be and who we can’t.  
We are constantly barraged by expectations of others –  
expectations of parents and siblings and grandparents  
and teachers and coaches and friends and colleagues and bosses and the media.  
We are constantly being shaped and formed by those expectations  
which may or may not have anything to do with what God expects of us.

I believe God took Jesus out into the desert so that God and Jesus could be alone  
so that God could help Jesus find out how to live into that new life which he received in his baptism.

Scripture says that God delights in fulfilling the desires of our hearts.

But that doesn't necessarily mean that we're going to get that million dollars, or that high-powered job,  
or that mansion, or that relationship, just because that's what we think we want.

What it means is that God knows us better than we know ourselves –

and God knows the true desires of our hearts which go so much deeper than anything that we might ask for.

God knows what will truly bring us peace and joy.

God knows what will make our lives meaningful and impactful.

And the way we get to that place,

the way we begin to see ourselves as God sees is,

the way our desires merge with God's desires for us,

is to get on the same page as God –

which means long, extended, uninterrupted, ongoing conversations with God.

Or in other words, prayer.

God drove Jesus into the desert so that Jesus could get to know God better,

so that he could discern God's will for his life,

and so that he could glimpse the potential that God saw in him and begin to live into it.

That happened primarily through prayer.

And something else happened in the desert also.

Having nothing else and no one else to depend on,

Jesus was forced to rely on God to provide for all of his needs –

his needs for food and water, clothing and shelter, protection from the elements and the wild beasts –

ALL of his needs.

And as God met each of Jesus his needs, Jesus' trust in God grew.

Now some of you may feel that your most productive years are behind you.

Some of you may feel that you've already reached your potential.

But I'm here to tell you that you haven't.

Because as long as you are alive, God is calling you to repent,

to turn from being the person you were to be the new being that God is creating,

to help you reach your full potential.

Some of you might feel that it's too late for that, that you're too old, that your time is past.

Well just remember Jesus only lived three years after his time in the desert and look what he accomplished.

And Jesus said, that with the power of the Spirit – the very Spirit that drove him into the desert –

you can do even greater things than Jesus.

Jesus spent 40 days alone with God, discussing his life with God, and getting to know God better.

Jesus spent 40 days, discerning who God was calling him to be and what God was calling him to do.

Jesus spent 40 days, discovering how to trust in God and in God alone.

As we begin our 40 day journey my prayer is that you will find time to be alone with God,

to discuss your life with God and get to know God better,

to discern who it is that God is calling you to be and what it is that God is calling you to do,

and to discover how to trust God more and more each day.

Spend time with God.

Discuss your life.

Discern the unfulfilled potential God sees in you.

And discover the joy of living in trust and faith.

May these 40 days be not only the beginning of the rest of your life, but of the best of your life. **Amen**