

Discovering Who We Are

By: Meagan McLaughlin

March 1, 2020. We are beginning two separate journeys at the same time — the journey of Lent and the journey of the ministry that we will discover together. Pastor Meagan's sermon this morning reminds us that as we share these journeys, God is present, guiding us.

Readings: Matthew 4:1-11

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Here we are, and it is my first Sunday here at Christ Lutheran, and it is our first Sunday of Lent, and we seek these 40 days to encounter God in the world around us. And so we're going to begin today two separate journeys at the same time — the journey of Lent as we walk with Jesus as he encounters many different people in the community around him on his way to the cross, and the journey of the ministry that we will share and discover together as a family of faith, as we get to know one another and encounter the Spirit working among us, and in our communities and our neighborhoods around us.

And as I reflected on these two journeys, and on today's readings, it occurred to me that these journeys are really not so different from one another. They are all about relationship. Jesus encountered people as he went, and the people that he met encountered God in Jesus. We will see this over and over in the stories that we will hear as we gather during these 40 days. We in our human journey encounter people as we go, and encounter God along the way. Human relationships, and relationships with God.

And as we look especially at our gospel story from Matthew today, with Jesus in the desert, being tempted by Satan, another common thread of our Lenten journey and our own journey as community is revealed. Jesus is tempted three times — to turn stones into bread, to throw himself down from the mountain, and to worship power and evil instead of trusting God. And with each temptation, each encounter with Satan, Jesus becomes a little more clear about who he is as God with skin on.

Each temptation is an attempt to set Jesus apart from humanity, to make him relevant, and spectacular, and powerful, as Henri Nouwen suggests. And each time, Jesus claims his trust in God, and his dependence on God, and his commitment to living fully the human experience with us. It is about relationships, encounters with each other and with God.

And, it's about who Jesus is called to be in the world. Not apart from, but one of. Not to be powerful, and spectacular, but to embody the love and the healing and the reconciliation and the mercy of God for all those that he encounters on the way.

And as we begin to share ministry together, we too are on a journey to discover more about who we are, who we are becoming, as beloved children of God, and as a community of faith. Because each one of us here embodies the love and mercy of God in a beautifully unique way, and as the Spirit is revealed in our encounters with one another, our whole community is transformed, each one of us is transformed.

We all know that I am new among you, and I have already been changed in the short time I've been here. Each week, as we gather, we are changed by the encounters that we have with one another, whether we've been part of this congregation for decades, or whether we are here for the very first time.

In the community of those gathered here in this moment of time, we encounter one another and God when we enter into relationship with one another as we worship, as we learn, as we enjoy a cup of coffee in the Fellowship Hall.

In the community of those gathered here in this moment in time, we discover a little bit more about who God is calling us to be, and how we can embody the love and mercy of God in our unique human experience for all of those we meet along the way.

Two separate journeys, Lent and the beginning of our ministry together, and yet they are really one journey, aren't they? As a family of faith, you and I, we go through these 40 days, encountering God in one another, and in the world around us, and we grow in our capacity to see one another, to see God. And with each encounter, we are transformed, know more clearly who we're called to be as children of God, and who God is calling us to be together as a community of faith.

We are just beginning a journey of 40 days. In Biblical language, 40 days doesn't necessarily mean 40 literal 24-hour periods. 40 shows up a lot in scriptures — Noah and his family were in the ark for 40 days, according to one telling of the ancient flood story. Moses spent 40 days with God on the mountain, and the Israelites were in the desert for 40 years! In all of these stories, there is an aspect of the unknown, sometimes a feeling of being lost for a little while, sometimes even a feeling of being abandoned on a journey that seems far too long.

And in each of these stories, we know God is present. God carried Noah and his family and animals to dry land in the ark, with the promise of the rainbow to encourage them as they started life anew after the flood. Moses came away from his time on the mountain with guidance for life together as people of God, and God guided the Israelites to their new home with fire and cloud, and renewed his promise and their covenant for their life together as people of God before they entered the Promised Land.

People of God who were listening to Isaiah were reminded of God's call, and we're reminded today as well: "Is not this the kind of fasting I've chosen: to loose the chains of injustice, to untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter?" We are called to be in a relationship with one another in which God's abundance is shared. We are called to remember that we are all God's people.

At the end of Jesus' time in the desert, as Matthew tells the story, angels "suddenly" appear and wait on him. Suggesting that far from being abandoned, God was with Jesus all along.

And God is with us, this community gathered here this morning, and whether you've been attending for decades or are here for the first time, we walk these 40 days of Lent, and begin ministry together, as a community. And when we feel anxious about the unknown, or a little bit lost, we can look around us, and know that in the midst of this journey, we are not alone. God is present, guiding us, and as we will sing in just a moment, we are all connected with one another.

Our journey has begun, and together we will encounter God, in our relationships with one another, in our neighborhoods, our families, and in this community of faith. As God was with Noah and his family in the ark, with Moses and the Israelites in the desert, and Jesus as he faced Satan, God is with us, showing us who we are called to be in this world. Thanks be to God!

*** Keywords ***

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