

From the Rector's Study, the Rev. Bryce Sangster
Sunday, December 10th, 2023, Advent II
Isaiah 40:1-11, Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13, 2 Peter 3:8-15a, Mark 1:1-8

A voice crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord. This brings together a couple of different concepts and ways of looking at life. Being in the wilderness or the desert seems like a bad place to be, but maybe there's learning in the wilderness. And the desert isn't just sand. So, the wilderness and the desert are a lot more complicated than first look.

Yes, this means perhaps finding value and meaning in the wilderness in the desert. And the value of the self but looking towards the other. The words prepare the way of the Lord. But there's also an element of time as well. In Isaiah we hear about the grass withering. *The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass.*

This suggests enjoying and living in the present because it's not going to last, and yet setting priorities which look to the future and for others in the community.

This is expressed in another way as Mark quotes John the Baptist when he says he himself baptizes with water and the one coming after him will baptize with the Holy Spirit. There are various ways of looking at this, but baptism with water would suggest forgiveness of sins. That it would be personal about us ourselves and that it would be about the past and the present. Baptism by the Holy Spirit brings up the idea that baptism is not just for us as individuals and for the future.

And there's also the element the Holy Spirit guiding us and supporting us to the times of being in the desert in the wilderness. Giving us the strength and the hope to get through these periods in our lives. And this may help us understand wilderness and the desert in our lives.

And it brings up the idea of choice. That our times in the wilderness in the desert are times of learning and growth. And give us a perspective which is helpful in figuring out what it means to make the Lord's paths straight.

I thought of a story that may give us some insight. I think I have mentioned it before. By Wayne Dwyer. The story of the married man who hated going to his wife's family for dinner on Sunday afternoon. He would rather stay home and watch football. But he felt his wife drag him out every Sunday to be with her family. And he didn't like them. For instance, she had a weird uncle George. So, every Sunday the man gritted his teeth and went along with his wife to dinner.

Until one day the man came to the realization that he was in an adult and could choose to go or stay home and watch football. Yes, his wife would not be happy with his decision, and he would have to face her displeasure at him not going to be with her when she went to her family but other than that she was not making him go. He did not realize that all this time it was his choice. And how can we be upset about

our own choices? And lo and behold he began to enjoy his time with his wife's family. Her uncle George had not changed but the man was able to see her uncle George in a more positive light.

And so, we to make choices when we're open to the Holy Spirit to show us ways to make God's pass straight. Yes, an element of sacrifice, but we choose to do so. And when mark says *the voice of one crying out in the wilderness*: the crying out may have an element of pain to it, but it's on behalf of others. And calling us to a direction that we can take to make it better for all of us going forward this day and forevermore.

Amen

May the path that you walk
be ever guided by justice and light
By the truth that you stand.
May it show, into the land.
May the words of Christ
disturb you all your life.
The road you've chosen is not easy
– yet, here you stand!
(from the song, *The Path*, by Jason Mann, adapted)