

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

“The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart.”

We start out into the desert spaces alongside of Jesus. Now in Lent, we are reminded of our humanity, our frailty, our fragility. We are but dust, and to dust we shall return. Without God, you and I are no more than what we wipe off of our window sills during spring cleaning. You and I...without God...are no more, and no less...than what you will find on the white glove touching the top of the mantle. How is that?

The scriptures for today also call to mind that same tenuous grasp that we hold on life. They lay out the many ways we are called to respond to and from our humanity this Lenten season.

In the reading from Deuteronomy, we are called to live with thankfulness. Though our hands have toiled the earth to bring forth fruits, it is the Lord who owns the land and has blessed us to inhabit it. We are called to be good stewards and to give back out of what we have been given.

In the psalm, we are called to trust in God’s mercy, to take refuge in the Lord. The fragility that we experience in our lives does not need to stir up fear and anxiety in us. We are freed by faith to take refuge, to trust, to be held safe in the arms of grace.

And Paul’s letter calls his readers to an incredible, empowering humility “for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek.” All who confess faith in Jesus Christ are opened to the possibility of life redeemed and reconciled to God. Forget the works or merit of walking piles of dust and ashes...we are saved only by that grace that comes from orienting our lives toward Christ.

On this First Sunday in Lent, we join Jesus on his journey in the desert...facing temptations and trials and roadblocks along the way in our own journeys toward Jerusalem. What will this Lenten season be for us...where we are, on our Christian journey toward Jerusalem? What form or manifestation of thankfulness, trust, and humility will you hope and pray will help you as you progress toward new life in Christ Jesus? "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart"

Jesus did not head out into the wilderness with a fannypack of trailmix, or an iced six-pack of his favorite beverages in an Igloo cooler, or even a GPS programmed to a set destination. By being “driven out” by the Spirit, we might assume he left in a bit of a hurry.

His wallet with the VISA and AAA card, his cell, and keys were left on the nightstand. This rush, last minute, into the wilderness was a test in a way...and, like most tests, he...and we...cannot use notes, outlines, or cheat sheets.

He was proverbially naked. Stripped down to simply his self. And by being faced with the incredible temptations of his human frailty, he was offered the easiest defense against that frailty...and that was the ability to control. Having the control to create food where there is none, to rule with power, to defy his physical nature. But, instead, Jesus stood firm in his humanity, clothed only with thankfulness, trust, and humility. Thankful for the nourishment that is not food. Trusting in the God that does not need testing. Humble enough to obey the law given him by his ancestors and inspired by God. In using all three to face these three tests, without notes, Jesus resisted the temptation to take control into his own hand...and, in doing that, he became prepared to begin his ministry.

For many people of us, there is no greater fear than being naked in front of others. We see so many unrealistic and unnatural bodies in the media that the realness of our own bodies becomes frightening and shaming. Our lack of control, of youth, of power become reasons for hiding....and I do not just mean that literally.

We hide everywhere. We hide behind work, behind family, behind productivity and profitability. We hide behind our fears, and we hide behind our scars. It is natural in a world that is struggling to accommodate so many people that each of us as individuals can quickly become invisible. When we become invisible, it is easy to run into us, like running into furniture in the dark. So, we hide.

But, if we take seriously and solemnly the challenge that Lent puts before us....the taking on of the journey with Jesus into the desert to be tested, we have a wonderful, liberating opportunity. The opportunity to NOT be what the world seems to be calling us to be...as in thinner, fitter, smarter and faster. The opportunity to NOT be what even maybe our town and families are calling us to be.

Instead, we are challenged to be naked, like Jesus in the desert. We are challenged to confront ourselves with whom our God is calling us to be...and what is that? God calls us to be....Frail. Insignificant. Humble. Thankful. Trusting. Human.

What does human look like? It can be hard to see ourselves in a natural, liberating light. But this Lent, God invites us to look. As Jesus looked upon himself, he found his frailty....in the physical heat and exhaustion of a forty day fast in the desert. In his frailty, he found real strength and will.....to trust, and thank, and bow.

Perhaps that is as far as we will get this Lent, in looking upon ourselves. Perhaps that is as far as we need to get....this Lent, or ever. In seeing ourselves, we begin to see those around us.

There is a triumphant entry, a table full of friends, a cross and a tomb waiting for every one of us. But for now, in the meantime, in this Lenten time, simply look...and know that the Word is so very near to you, "on your lips and in your heart." Each one of us carrying Christ to each other and to all others we encounter, in praise of the Living God known to us within the Names of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.