

“Two Lenten Questions”

Matthew 3:16-4:11, Mark 1:15 & Psalm 16:10

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Matthew 3:16-4:11 NLT “After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy. Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry. During that time the devil came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread.” But Jesus told him, “No! The Scriptures say, ‘People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, “If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say, ‘He will order his angels to protect you. And they will hold you up with their hands so you won’t even hurt your foot on a stone.’” Jesus responded, “The Scriptures also say, ‘You must not test the Lord your God.’” Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. “I will give it all to you,” he said, “if you will kneel down and worship me.” “Get out of here, Satan,” Jesus told him. “For the Scriptures say, ‘You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him.’” Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus.”

Two Lenten questions: *Am I broken, cracked, dry enough to receive the healing, restoring, refreshing living water of God’s grace? Do I trust God enough, do I think God is mighty enough, to use someone as flawed and small as me to bring shalom to the world?*

Our value, worth, purpose, glory all come from being a beloved child of God. God created and sustains the cosmos to communicate to you every moment of your life: “You are my dearly loved child. You bring me great joy.” Baptism, water, is a constant reminder that we are a cherished member of God’s family. God does not love us, because we are good. God loves us, because God is good. God is grace. We are broken, sinful, lacking love, deficient in joy and devoid of peace. God gives us completeness, forgiveness, love, joy, and peace. On our own we are nothing. When we accept God’s grace we are glorious.

Jesus was fully God and fully human. The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted so Jesus can know our suffering, to understand our temptations, so Jesus can fully relate to you every moment of your life. The fully human Jesus had to learn to wrestle with his ego, like each of us must wrestle with our ego. We are to move beyond our ego, that is the desire for control, to let go, so we can let come God’s blessings. Even our faith can become a quest to be right, to do things right, for power, rather than dancing with the mystery of God’s grace. God beckons us to move from a mere belief system to experiences of God’s glorious delight in you. Richard Rohr said, “I would not respect any God that I could figure out.” Saint Augustine said, “If you understand it, then it is not God.”

Our ego hears God’s delight in us, then jumps to the conclusion that it is about us, that we, on our own, are somehow worthy, that we know God’s will. It is easy to get stuck in this miserable condition. God invites us to change our mind to realize we are nothing, so we can accept everything from God.

Jesus’ first words in the gospel of Mark are **Mark 1:15** “**Ultimate reality is at hand! Change your mind and believe such good news.**” Richard Rohr wrote, “We have all seen cartoons of an angry, bearded man walking around holding or wearing the sign “Repent!” If the sign is large enough, he might even carry the entire bible verse: “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand!” The message is seemingly that you’d better get ready for the judgement of an angry God who will punish you for your sins. The presumed solution is to join a church, believe the right set of religious ideas, or get rid of your sin. But did anyone ever tell you that Jesus’ very first message in the Gospels, which is usually translate as “convert,” “repent,” or “reform” in the Greek literally means to “change your mind?” Jesus’ first word to us was “change!”—and mind change at that! What we have

translated as “repent” is not a moralistic or even churchy word at all; it is a clear strategy for enlightenment for the world. Once you accept ongoing change as a central program for yourself, you tend to continue growing throughout all of your life. Jesus knows that self-critical, yet not negative, people will always keep growing and engaging with the world around them, with themselves, and with God. They will especially flourish inside of difficulties. The rest of us use our minds to close down, close off, and avoid all change. The ego and the false self hate change more than anything else in the world and the mind is their primary control tower. ... The mind by nature is intent on judging, controlling and analyzing instead of seeing, tasting, and loving. The mind wants a job, to process things. The key to stopping this game is quite simply, peace, silence, or stillness. The ego cannot follow Jesus and go into the wilderness for forty days where there is nothing to say, to prove, to think or to defend.” **Psalm 16:10 NLT “Be still, and know that I am God!”**

The mind craves knowledge, but it needs to be aware that most information is tainted with biases, agendas, prejudice, and attempts to control. The mind is useful but when it does not recognize its own finite viewpoint, then our mind is useless. The mind can tell left from right, but it cannot perceive invisible things such as love, eternity, wholeness, mystery, joy, grace, or God.

Why do we let our ego torture us? Every viewpoint is merely that a view from just one point. Why do we have a hard time realizing that our ego always has a preference, bias, and need. Our information is always incomplete. What makes it so hard to accept other viewpoints when our ego has declared a conclusion in our mind? The ability to calmly observe our inner dramas, without rushing to judgment is foundational for spiritual seeing. It is the primary form of “dying to the self”. It enables us to change our mind, to stop, to let go, to let come. Prayer is a practice that changes the one who is praying. Spirituality is letting our self be changed by a mysterious encounter with forgiveness, mercy, grace, peace, joy, and love.

Am I broken, cracked, dry enough to receive the healing, restoring, refreshing living water of God’s grace?

Jesus, the change-maker, came into the world. The Holy Spirit, the change-maker is loving you into glorious wholeness.

If you’ve ever wrestled with the questions of life, suffering and death; if you’ve ever felt out of control, where your usual ways of coping and living don’t work; if you’ve ever been in a struggle that took every ounce of strength you had, then you have visited the wilderness.

Jesus enters fully, deeply into our wilderness experiences. After 40 days, Jesus was tempted. By the time the Adversary shows up, Jesus is broken down and as “wildernessed” as he could possibly be. Given that vulnerability—given that physical weakness—what gives him the ability to resist temptation? His trust in God. Jesus does not rely on himself. Jesus relies on God. Jesus does not even think an original thought, or utter an original word. Jesus fully let go. Nothing was about himself, rather it was all about God. Jesus responds with God’s words from scripture.

Jesus went into the wilderness, so he can get us through the wilderness. Jesus endured temptation so he can enable us to endure temptation.

Mary Karr chronicles her life as an alcoholic, her recovery from booze, and her eventual baptism into the Catholic church. She shares her distaste with the whole idea of praying while kneeling. There is something in her that recoils at the thought of getting on her knees. She protests, “What kind of God wants me to get on my knees and supplicate myself?” The spiritual director replies, “You don’t do it for God! You do it for yourself.” She protests again, “How does getting on your knees do anything for you?” The spiritual director replies, “It makes you the right size. When your disease has ahold of you, it tells you, your suffering is special or unique, but everybody is suffering something. We kneel to put our body in that places, because otherwise, our mind can’t grasp it.”

The wilderness makes us the right size. The sun bears down on us and the wind whips us until we are dry, cracked open, so that God’s grace can pour in making us alive and supple again.

The wilderness reveals our dependence on God. We can confess our sins and repent and be baptized and do all the right things, but it's still God's power and God's might and God's grace working through our fragile, frail, fleshy human bodies.

God's grace forgives everything. God's grace heals every wound. God's grace mends every brokenness. God's grace wipes away every tear. God's grace makes you glorious. God's grace is for everyone. God's grace blows our minds. We are unable to even begin to fathom the enormous wonder of God's grace. God's grace changes us, changes how we treat ourselves, changes how we treat others. God's grace gets us through the wilderness. God's grace carries us when we fall exhausted, empty, dismayed. God's grace gives us a glimpse of the dawn of redeeming grace that will make the cosmos and each of us glorious.

Everything is out of control in the wilderness. There we discover that we are not in control. In the wilderness, our coping mechanisms get stripped away. In the wilderness, we discover it is not our hunger, fame, or power that define us, rather God's love defines us. In the wilderness, we discover it is not our disease, suffering or struggles that define us, rather God's love defines us. In the wilderness, it is not our regrets, failures or sin that define us, rather God defines us. Are you broken, cracked, dry enough to receive the healing, restoring, refreshing living water of God's grace?

Jonathan Daniels was a rich kid from rural New Hampshire. His sophomore year his father abruptly died. It was a time in the wilderness for him, leading to a reassessment of his priorities. He was convicted by Dr. King's call to come to Selma for a weekend. And again, he entered a kind of wilderness, wrestling with his class and privilege in simply visiting the horrors his brothers and sisters were experiencing in Alabama. He went back to New England, but that time of displacement would forever change him. He would go back to Selma again and again—for a semester, for a summer—and in August 1965 he participated in a small protest and was jailed. After six days, the group was released. While waiting for a ride home, they went into a grocery store to buy a drink. A deputy was threatening a black family, and Jonathan stepped in between them, pushing a young girl back out of the way. The deputy fired, and Jonathan was killed.

The wilderness is serious business. It will change you. I hear stories like that and I think, could I ever do that? Would I have what it takes to step into the line of fire? And it's really not the right question. That's still a question about me. God says it's not about us. The right question, the wilderness Lenten question is, does God have what it takes? Do I trust God enough, do I think God is mighty enough, to use someone as flawed and small as me to bring shalom to the world? That's a wilderness Lenten question. And it's a big enough question to keep me captivated for a lifetime. Do I trust God enough, do I think God is mighty enough, to use someone as flawed and small as me to bring shalom to the world? Amen