

The Methodist Liaison Office Jerusalem Lenten Devotions
The First Sunday of Lent
18 February 2018

Gospel Reading for the day: Mark 1: 9-15

The Baptism and Testing of Jesus

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

Jesus Announces the Good News

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Hymn 287 from "Singing the Faith"

V1. When I survey the wondrous cross,
on which the Prince of Glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.

"At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert and he was in the desert forty days." (Mark 1 v12). The Judean desert is a pretty desolate place. When the scorching heat of the summer sun shines on the waterless hills, the temperatures can soar to 50 degrees centigrade. But the desert days before his earthly ministry were preparing Jesus for what was ahead.

It's been a desert time for many Palestinians over the last few months. There is little hope of any real peace process. The aspirations held for decades of a Palestinian State have all but evaporated. There have been many young Palestinians arrested in the protests that have taken place since the American recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The year two thousand and eighteen promises to be a very difficult year.

As we begin lent with Jesus in the desert - it feels for many Palestinian Christians that they too are in the desert. They too are being tested. They too are being prepared. But then we are

reminded by the well-known verse of the hymn chosen for this Sunday's devotions, that our sufferings are as nothing compared to those of Jesus. His sufferings led to the cross and then ultimately to the resurrection. The desert experience transformed into the new hope of resurrection life. Though the season of lent reminds us of the suffering we all face - its conclusion comes in the shining light of Easter.

Whatever it is we face today - we face it in the knowledge that the God of resurrection is with us and that he is a God of Justice and Peace, and through all our sufferings in the end will come the Kingdom of God, - will come a time of Peace and Justice.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father as you look upon the earth you must weep for your people, seeing as you do our conflicts and our fears. May this Lenten season prepare us, as the desert prepared Jesus, that we might shine with your light in the darkness of the world. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Picture credit: "The Judean Desert" Taken by John Howard, Israel, (Place Taken)

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