

21.02.21

Lent 1

Mark 1: 9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Immediately upon coming out of the water, Jesus saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. Then a voice came from heaven, 'You are my child, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

Immediately the Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

After John's arrest, Jesus appeared in Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, saying, 'This is the time of fulfillment. The reign of God is at hand! Change your hearts and minds, and believe this Good News!'

SERMON

In her chapter entitled "A Mother's Work" in *Braiding Sweetgrass*¹, Robin Wall Kimmerer tells the story of house hunting, as she and her 2 young daughters were preparing to move from Kentucky back to the land of her childhood, in upstate NY. Her daughters had an explicit wish list - 5 things they wanted in a new home - 2 trees big enough for tree forts, a stone walk lined with pansies, a red barn, a pond to swim in and a purple bedroom. If nothing else, she thought, I can paint a bedroom purple.

At the end of a long winter, where she looked at house after house, her spirits sagging like the rotting porches on those she could afford, the realtor drove her up to a farmhouse with promise. Large maples in the yard, 7 acres that included what was described as a trout pond, and low and behold - the corner bedroom was the color of spring violets - a sign that sealed the deal.

¹ 2013. Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding Sweetgrass*. Milkweed editions. P 82-89.

Well, that pond may once have been clean enough to support trout, but when spring rolled around what they found was a pond so choked with green that they couldn't tell where the weeds left off and the water began. Definitely not swimmable by her daughter's standards.

And so began the work of pond restoration. Robin carried her small, solo canoe up the hill to the pond to serve as a floating platform - she thought she could paddle out, scoop up the algae with a long handled rake, dump it in the canoe, then empty the scum on the shore before going for a nice swim.

The only swimming that first day was when physics prevailed and those rakefuls of duckweed were so heavy the canoe toppled over -spilling everything in the canoe overboard.

Next she tried standing on shore with a rake and reaching out as far as she could - but that only got her so far. Then in sneakers at waters edge, which evolved to Wellingtons and eventually hip waders. Well when she reached a little too far, feeling the icy pond rushing in over the tops of her hip boots, she realized that transformation is not accomplished by tentative wading at the edge.

Finally, donning shorts and a t-shirt, she walked right in up to her waist, the wisps of algae tickling her legs, there the real work of transformation began. Her feet squishing into the muck, trailing strands of green scum caught in her hair.

Yes, Robin embraced that realization - **“Transformation is not accomplished by tentative wading at the edge.”**

Our gospel story today starts with J. wading into the river Jordan, where he's baptized and filled with the affirmation of God's love. He hears 'you are my beloved, whom I love dearly'.

Then immediately, that same spirit drives him into the wilderness where J spends 40 days and nights, plunged into the landscape of temptation, surrounded by wild beasts and angels offering protection.

And the very next verse tells us of John's arrest.

It was the arrest of John, in Mark's gospel, that ushered in the ministry of Jesus.

After John's arrest, Jesus appeared in Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, saying, 'This is the time of fulfillment. The reign of God is at hand! Change your hearts and minds, and believe; trust, this Good News!'

It's after John's arrest we have Jesus announcing GOD'S euangelion

This word was not new to the gospel listeners. **Euangelion** - this is the same word used by the Roman empire, whenever they crushed a rebellion or defeated an enemy. Wanting to celebrate the power of Rome, they sent out a euangelion - a good news proclamation of ROME, spreading the news of victory of oppressors over the oppressed.²

Euangelion - to the listeners of the gospel, it signaled the powerful defeating the marginalized.

But here comes Jesus, proclaiming not the euangelion of Rome, but the good news of God.

In this first sermon of Jesus in the book of Mark, he goes on: 'This is the time of fulfillment. The reign of God, the kingdom of God, is at hand!'

² <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/lent1b>

Now is the time. Just as this is not Rome's good news, the new kingdom, or empire - *basileo*, again a word used by the powerful of that time, this basileo, this empire, is God's empire. Here comes not the Roman empire, not the human empire, not even the Israelite empire. Here comes God's empire. Change your hearts and minds and believe, trust in THIS euangelion.³

Change your hearts and minds - be transformed, and trust God's good news.
What an invitation to something radically new.

My friends, lent is not a time for wading at the edge.

Sometimes we are called to step into the waters of change, to do the work of bringing about something new.

Other times, changing our hearts and minds, participating in God's good news, might look like taking a stand for others, like Derrick Bell Jr, who was highlighted in the recent "Teaching Tolerance" magazine published by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Mr. Bell was the first tenured Black law professor at Harvard University. He lived out his beliefs when he resigned from that position to protest the lack of Black women on faculty. But that wasn't the first time Mr. Bell put at risk his immediate self interest - back in 1959, just 2 years out of law school, he left his position with the US Justice department because he refused to cut ties with the NAACP. And then later in his career, when he was the first African American dean of the University of Oregon Law School, he resigned. Again he resigned in protest after the university directed him not to hire an Asian American candidate for a faculty position.⁴

Derrick Bell Jr. a man of faith, chose over and over to step into the work of transforming society - of bringing God's basileo - God's kingdom, into his sphere of influence.

My friends, Lent is a time of identifying what is essential,
what really matters,

³ <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/lent1b>

⁴ <https://www.thehistorymakers.org/biography/derrick-bell-jr>

who we are at our core - embracing ourselves and embracing others as beloved children of a God who invites all of us to transformation.

We are called to Metanoia, to transform, to trust the Good News of God - not the ever changing news of our empires. But trust; step into the river of our baptism and hear God's affirmation of us, as beloved; to journey into the wilderness with Jesus, and open our hearts and minds to being changed - as individuals and as a community. Being changed by the euangelion - this Good News of God.

Trust, believe the good news of God. May the journey through into the deep, accompanied by the God who calls us beloved, continue.

End with MB rendition of "I Believe" created for Ash Wednesday.