

“Wandering”  
By Rev. Katrina Pekich-Bundy  
Genesis 2.15-17; 3.1-7  
Matthew 4.1-11  
February 26, 2023

Last spring my family and I vacationed at one of our favorite parks. We rented a cabin and went from one trail to the other, exploring familiar sites. There is one that we always visit multiple times on our trip. It has waterfalls and caves and rock stairs and bridges. We arrived at the end, and there was another option to follow another trail to another cave. We paused and I tried to remember if we had gone that way before. One kid was convinced we had, the other didn't care because they wanted to go back to the car. So, Rob went to the car with that kid and I began the journey with the other.

We walked for about ten minutes and then saw a sign that said the trail was four miles. “This doesn't look familiar,” I said. “Maybe we should turn around.” My kid was very encouraging, and said, “We can do it!” So we kept going.

Over an hour later, and four miles later, we made it to the car. There was wailing and gnashing of teeth and crankiness, and the kid was even getting a little bit hungry. We had been completely unprepared for a four-mile hike beyond our regular hike. I hadn't packed water or snacks, and my cell phone didn't have service. If someone had stopped me and said, “I'll give you this granola bar for fifty bucks” I probably would have handed them my wallet.

I was unprepared. Usually, I like to take a backpack full of snacks and water, but didn't do this. Today is the first Sunday of Lent. We often talk about as a journey in the wilderness, usually reflecting on stories from the Israelites forty years in the desert or, like today, Jesus' temptation in the desert. Friends, I would not have made it forty years in the desert. There are many times in which we can relate to feeling isolated or lonely or lost or confused. Lent is a time in which we prepare ourselves for the world and the wilderness of life. We look within ourselves and ask repentance for the ways in which we have harmed others, and we realign our path to follow God.

Our Gospel reading is called the temptation of Jesus in the desert. He has gone out to pray, to have some quiet time, and someone appears and asks Jesus to use his powers. “If you are the Son of God,” is the refrain over and over. They want proof. They want to trip up Jesus.

It is easy to play the “if” game in our world. “If only there was peace.” “If only people had more money, more food.” “If only everyone had housing.” I have a list of “if onlys” that, if they were resolved, I also know there would be more added to that list. Those ifs are often conditional upon other ifs. If we solved the issue of housing, we have to also solve the issue of unemployment, and lack of access to food. The list goes on and on because these “ifs” are connected.

I had many excellent conversations with some of you after last week's Matthew 25 service. We talked about gun violence, and what happens if certain kinds of guns were banned,

or if certain laws were put in place. Ultimately, the conversations that took place ended with, “Well, then it might reduce gun violence, but this is just a temporary solution.”

The issue is huge. AND we have to start somewhere. To do nothing because it is so huge is also not the answer. Something I learned is that so often we are frozen because we are afraid we will do the wrong thing - so we do nothing. But if we take a bold step and try something, maybe it can unfreeze others, and we can work together for change.

As I read commentaries for this week’s passage, I came across a reflection from Rev. Kathryn Johnston, who serves as a Presbyterian minister in Pennsylvania. Her words were probably written months ago, but they struck me in that moment. She wrote: “Jesus is a survivor of a mass murder and has grown up among an oppressed people.”<sup>1</sup> Jesus survived a mass murder. This felt timely. I thought of the children who survived the violence of Sandy Hook, who then went on to MSU. The students who were traumatized at Oxford, and went to MSU.

Johnston’s writings went on to say that Jesus could have been tempted to just take over power and show all those who had oppressed his generation how it felt. But he didn’t. I look to all the young people who are crying out for gun laws and pleading for change. And I think we must follow their leadership. I think we have to put aside whatever pride or superiority we feel about this and listen and act.

We will make mistakes along the way. We will think we are standing up for the right thing, only to find out we were excruciatingly wrong. There has to be room for action and grace. Our other story today is from the second creation story on Genesis. In this story God created humans and told them to leave the tree of knowledge alone. And actually, I love to argue semantics on the Genesis passage, because they are so often taken out of context and not fully cited. So, God told only Adam that he couldn’t eat of the tree - as far as we know, God never told this to Eve. We do know that she has some sort of knowledge because the serpent, an animal God created in the garden, asks her what God has said. She says they can’t eat it or touch it - but God only said they couldn’t eat it. The serpent tells her that she can eat it but it will make her like God. The serpent doesn’t lie. But Eve really wants to have this knowledge, and eats it, and gives some to Adam. Eve is then blamed for it, but Adam could have said no.

Immediately they realize they are naked and experience shame - a new emotion, perhaps new knowledge, and they cover themselves up. We could easily focus on the mistakes humans make in this tale, but what we rarely read is in verse 21. Before God sends them out of the garden, God sews them clothes. God cares for them. God doesn’t send them out unequipped.

We do not go these forty days in Lent unequipped. We have God, each other, and spiritual practices. This might look like many things - scripture, prayers, journaling, wandering.

We have to be willing to wander. The ways we have gone haven’t worked for so many reasons. I’ve been listening to singer Brandi Carlile lately, specifically her song *Have you Ever*. She talks about wandering through the woods, where everything falls into place. Then wandering and looking at the stars, asking about purpose. Finally wandering in snow, but unable to return.

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<sup>1</sup> Kathryn Z. Johnston, “February 26” in *Christian Century*. (February 2023, Vol. 140, No. 2), 29.

When we wander, we have to be ready to ask who are we, why are we here, and to venture away from the comfortable. Lent is extremely uncomfortable as we reflect on the ways in which we have contributed to pain and sorrow in the world, and promise to change our ways. But it is essential.

May God be our guide through this journey. Amen.