

“Let Down the Walls”

Message by DD Adams

Providence United Methodist Church

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The gospel lesson for today is taken from the book of Mark, chapter 1, verses 9 through 15. I’m reading from the New Revised Standard Version. In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’

And the Spirit immediately drove him 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. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’ This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God.

Let’s pray. God of all hope and love, fill us with your joy and perfect peace as we trust and receive your words. May your hope overflow in us and fill us with confidence in the ways of God. Let us feel the surrounding presence of God as we embrace your love. Pour into our hearts hope and trust that disperses fear. Fill us with joy and peace as we walk through our wilderness journeys. In Christ name we pray. Amen.

Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and left his private life of 30 years behind. He was baptized by John in the river Jordan. As he came up from the water, the heavens opened, and the spirit came down. The spirit descended as a dove and was a picture of gentleness—gentleness with love. It was a baptism of

repentance, but Jesus needed no such thing. He was without sin and perfect in all his ways. It was a moment of approval and identification as God's Son.

Immediately Jesus was driven into the wilderness. He was tempted by Satan for forty days in the presence of wild beasts as angels waited on him. It was a time of testing as we endure tests in our lives. Certainly the tests aren't meant to ruin us, but are designed that we might become stronger. At certain times, it seems we have no rest. It seems we're harassed at every turn. There's conflicts on the outside, and fears on the inside. And so we're driven into our wilderness journeys.

The synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, seem to have the same view on a lot of matters. All three state that Satan and wild beasts were there with Jesus. That's frightening to me. My guess is that if any of us were placed in that situation fear would immediately begin to wear us down.

Fear—it's real. Things that go bump in the night. Things that kill the body—they're real. Old age and being left alone—it's real. Being coldshouldered and ignored—it's a real feeling. Fear of failure—becoming unable to care for ourselves, being criticized, having no friends that *really care*, fear of having our husband or wife die, fear of having no money, losing our job, or seeing our kid hooked on drugs, getting a divorce, saying we're sorry, admitting it's our fault—all these are things we fear. We fear what will happen. We fear what won't happen. Plain and simple; it's part of our human condition. We all have fears.

I've noticed something over the years—more so in the last 3 ½. People are afraid to say "I'm sorry." They're afraid to say "It's my fault." They're afraid to consider they might be wrong. I agree it's difficult. But now you tell me, how else is a Christian disciple going to mature if they cannot repent? Repentance is at the core of entering into a life with God.

People need to say “I’m wrong” sometimes. They need to say it to God and they need to say it to their Christian brother or sister. If you were in church on Ash Wednesday that’s what that service was all about. It’s about saying to God and each other that we’re fallible—that we’re sinners saved by grace through faith. One of the prominent keys to becoming spiritually mature is to reconcile with each other and with God.

We are “. . . ambassadors who represent Christ” 2 Corinthians 5: 20 says. But we really cannot be ambassadors to others and represent Christ if we’re not reconciled with God. We have a responsibility to embody what reconciliation means. Through the acceptance of others and pursuing harmony and peace in our relationships we’re acting out our role as ambassadors of Christ. How does it feel to humble yourself before God and repent of a prideful or arrogant attitude? How does it feel to eat crow and humble pie? Well it’s very difficult. To apologize to someone, to not argue or defend yourself is one thing. It’s a whole other thing to go even farther and say, “It’s my fault.”

That’s what happened here at the altar last Wednesday evening. We knelt down, bowed our heads in the presence of God, and admitted who we are to God. We repented. We said it was our fault. It feels good to take responsibility for what’s wrong. It’s cleansing and freeing.

It’s spiritual progress that reaches out to God and says “God forgive me. I need you to help move me beyond my own pride.” Since the beginning of January the scriptures have talked about the importance of pursuing a change of heart and mind—that’s repentance. We turn; we ask for forgiveness, and we take responsibility for our failings—with each other and with God.

I think the biggest challenge we have as Christian disciples is to open our hearts to God on a regular basis—to admit our failings and own up to the truth of

who we are and what we lack. But how is it we do that? That's what Lent is all about. It's to bring us back to God, to restore the relationship, and to encourage us to see that we need to repent and examine our lives.

The verses of scripture we read for today tell us how to do that. First, repent and then believe. When we repent we take responsibility for our sin and we turn from it. Repentance is needed before we can open ourselves in faith. When we believe—we have faith. We put some legs on our faith. We become better disciples by opening up our hearts and letting down our walls.

We all need to feel the loving presence of God, but to do that we have to turn from selfish and arrogant ways we all pursue at times. We need to deny ourselves and begin to listen better to others and to God. It's a process, but it's so desirable and is so very pleasing to the Holy Spirit within us.

The place we begin when we open our hearts to God is to say I'm sorry. Please forgive me. It's my fault. It becomes healing for our hearts, and it facilitates harmony with others when we recognize our need to humble ourselves. We let down the walls and peace and freedom rush in like a flood.

God paints a rainbow of grace in our sky so we might remember God's love that embraces and surrounds us. It's a bright ribbon of color that serves to show us that God loves us. The waters of our baptism seal us in God's love. We worship a God of steadfast love and faithfulness. Let's be faithful to open our hearts to God during this Lenten season and be changed. Spend time praying and examining yourself. Say to God, "I repent," and to say to others, "It's my fault. I'm sorry." It opens a door to the presence of God in our lives that heals and sets us free. Let down the walls, and fear will dissipate, and the love of God will begin to bring healing to your life in a myriad of ways. Let's pray.

God of all that I am, help me to see my need for a more transparent approach in my prayer life with you. Help me to let down my walls. Help me to admit my shortcomings and fears so I might know the presence of God more fully. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.