



***When I tread the verge of Jordan, bid my anxious fears subside;  
bear me through the swelling current, land me safe on Canaan's side;  
Songs of praises, songs of praises, I will ever give to thee,  
I will ever give to thee.***

**Psalm of Confession:**

**Psalm 25:6-7, 16-18**

***Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love,  
for they have been from of old.  
For your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great.  
Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.  
Relieve the troubles of my heart, and bring me out of my distress.  
Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins.***

The Wilderness Heritage from the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 8:2-7a:

*Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. The clothes on your back did not wear out and your feet did not swell these forty years. Know then in your heart that as a parent disciplines a child so the Lord your God disciplines you. Therefore keep the commandments of the Lord your God, by walking in his ways and by fearing him. For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land....*

The Commandments of God from Exodus 20:2-17:

*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.  
You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth....  
You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God....  
Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy....  
Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving to you.  
You shall not kill.  
You shall not commit adultery.  
You shall not steal.  
You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.  
You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor.*



know. We have automobiles that speed us across a desert in a day, with gas tanks large enough to hold the fuel we need till the next filling station. Maybe we'll stop and spend the night at a little hideaway resort with palm trees and a swimming pool. Maybe it will be Las Vegas, and there'll be some diversions to enjoy. Or, if we want to avoid the bleakness of traveling a barren landscape altogether, we can always fly.

Our ancestors would have had a better visceral understanding of what it meant to endure a wilderness crossing, whether it was setting out on uncharted pathways to find a new home somewhere unknown, or boarding a ship and trusting the winds to take them where they would disembark. In our own time, there are some people who also would understand – the migrants driven by war and famine and politics from Africa, from Syria and other parts of the Middle East, or from poor and troubled nations in Central America. Like our ancestors, they know that entering the wilderness means leaving something precious behind; it may be money or possessions, family, professional status, language, safety, culture, or people who understand you; and they also know that the journey may be long enough that some will be lost along the way.

Of the liberated slaves who followed Moses, not one of them survived to enter the promised land. A whole generation died in the desert. But their children were free.

No one is tempted by the wilderness!

But in the wilderness, we confront the temptation of being possessed by what we have left behind. That's the significance of the practice of "giving something up for Lent." It's a recognition that we have possessions, habits, customs, attitudes and prejudices that feel comfortable to us, and that there are times when we need to give up some of our comfort in order to move on toward a better world.

When Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River, he emerged from the water with a new vision of his place in God's mission. Immediately, the Gospel emphatically says, the Spirit drove him out into the wilderness, where he was tempted for 40 days by Satan. Then the angels ministered to him – the messengers of God, because that is what an angel literally is, gave him the message that he would deliver to the world.

But first he had to withstand his temptation. What might that have been? Well, of course, it was to fall back, to reject the harshness of the wilderness that was only a sign in those 40 days of what he would endure on the long and painful journey to bring God's message of redemptive love to the world.

The temptation is always to be comforted by what we already have or what we remember as a time of personal ease. It may not be much in some of our lives, but it's what we know, and it's hard to give it up. For the followers of Moses, it was the remembrance of good food and plenty of water back in Egypt, or the longing for an idol of gold – a symbol perhaps of stability in the world they left behind. Do you suppose that such temptations could have clouded the memory of bondage and harsh punishment among these former slaves? How strong is our attachment

to the way things have always been! Even when it really wasn't very good at all, at least for some of us, we still long to bring the familiarity back again.

For Jesus, it may have been the quiet life of a peasant carpenter with friends and family in the rural community of Galilee, or perhaps he had dreams of becoming a learned and admired sage, since his teachings surely indicate that he had such gifts. No need to aggravate the Romans, no need to agitate the Temple authorities with disturbing prophetic words, no need to put himself in danger. But for 40 days he put such comforting thoughts aside, and he felt the calling to give them up, because he saw that the enjoyment of these comforts was reliant upon not listening to the suffering around him among the people that God loved. So he heard the message of the angels and went about the effort to unleash the spiritual power of heaven with a passion to change the world.

I won't ask you what you're giving up for Lent. Whatever it is may be valuable and important to you. But often these things we give up are superficial to our soul. But Lent is a time of deep discovery, when we are invited to put aside those things we need to leave behind so that the message of the angels can minister to us. For me, it seems like the angels who have helped me most are those I've met who came from different walks of life, especially those I might once have misjudged because I did not know them. Deepening relationships, expanding new relationships, easing up on self-interest and self-protection, listening, sharing, learning to take reasonable risks for the sake of others – these are Lenten disciplines of wilderness learning that help us put aside the baggage that does not serve the Way of Christ.

Musical Interlude

Jake Rizer

Our Time of Prayer

Holy God, as we gather on this first Sunday of the Lenten season, we give you thanks for the witness of Jesus, who put aside his safety and his opportunities for personal gratification to respond to the calling of your Spirit. He was tempted in the wilderness, just as we are. But he heard the calling of the angels and accepted his role as the servant of your grace and gave his life to bring the community of your love into being.

We pray, God, that we who seek to follow Jesus may be fully embraced by the spirit of your love, so that, when we are tempted and when we fail to be the people you want us to be, we may find forgiveness in you and learn to grow into the fullness of the stature of Christ.

We pray for our congregation, that we may strive to be the beloved community that you have called into being to carry out your mission in the world. May our neighbors see in our works of compassion the message of your Spirit alive in our midst.

We pray for those among us who are sick, those who live in communal facilities, those who are lonely or depressed, and all who yearn for restored opportunities to gather with friends and family as we move through this time of social distancing. May we soon see a time when the vaccines and scientific developments have done their work to prevent further contagion and restore our opportunities to gather.

As Jesus has taught us, so we pray:

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**

### **Closing Hymn**

#### **"When I Survey the Wondrous Cross"**

**#261**

**Worship & Rejoice Hymnal**

***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.***

***Forbid it Lord that I should boast, save in the death of Christ, my God;  
all the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to his blood.***

***See, from his head, his hands, his feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down.***

***Did e'er such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown.***

***Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.***

### **Benediction**

*Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.*

### **Postlude**