

Lent 1B  
Peace, Seattle  
February 22, 2015  
Mark 1:9-15

## MURKY WATERS

We're reading The Chronicles of Narnia in the Kindem home these days and right now we're on Volume 3 – Voyage of the Dawn Treader,<sup>1</sup> which tracks the adventures of Edward, Lucy, Caspian and their compatriots as they search the seas for the seven lost Lords of Narnia.

Last week the adventurers found themselves on a strange new island—one with invisible inhabitants. Turns out the island's residents—the Dufflepuds—have had a spell of invisibility put on them by the island's magician, and it's left to Lucy, the youngest of the voyagers, (and the only girl) to find the spell in the magician's great book of spells that will render the Dufflepuds visible again.

As she locates the book begins searching its pages she finds herself both enamored and tempted by what she finds. She manages to resist (barely) the spell that would make her “beautiful beyond the lot of mortals,” but there is one spell she cannot resist: the spell which lets her know what her friends really think of her.

No sooner does she say that spell then an image (imagine an imbedded video) appears in the book, and she can make out two of her classmates, Marjorie and Anne, traveling together by train, and the subject they're discussing is none other than Lucy.

You can guess what happens. What Anne says about Lucy is not what she'd hoped to hear, and she finds herself hurt, angry, and resentful.

It's only when the great Lion Aslan, the Christ figure of the Narnia tales, offers a deeper explanation for why Anne said what she did, that a reconciled friendship becomes possible.

A feature of the Narnia series I most appreciate is how they take you below the surface to contend with some of the murkiest and muckiest waters we humans face as we make our journey through this life.

**As we begin the season of Lent, today's texts beckon us on another murky voyage, a voyage whose context is the underbelly of the human story.**

THE GREAT FLOOD – HELL'S PRISON – WILDERNESS TEMPTATION... each lesson is an invitation to plunge beneath the surface of our outward, ego-driven selves to grapple with the appetites, temptations, miscues and questions which have bedeviled our two-legged species ever since consciousness emerged.

**We like to believe we are unencumbered, free actors, capable of controlling our own destinies. But texts such as these challenge that belief. The language of our confession this morning puts it as succinctly as it can be put: “We are in bondage and cannot free ourselves.”**

Forces beyond our control shape our lives and influence our destinies—forces within us and with out. And as the drama unfolds it becomes more and more clear we cannot survive under our own power.

Into that turbulent landscape today Jesus comes striding; ready to take on the principalities and the powers that would bind us.

**There's another attribute all three of our texts share: Water.**

Water is the means the Creator uses to destroy the first creation – it is also the element that floats Noah, his family, and the creatures of the Ark – and becomes, in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, the baptismal life raft to which even those lost in death's underworld prison can cling when the Crucified One descends to proclaim their liberation.

**In our gospel today Jesus enters the murky waters of the Jordan and then the desert.**

**Matthew and Luke have Jesus “led” by the Spirit into the wilderness after his baptism.**

But Mark offers a very different account of what happened. According to Mark, after his baptism in Jordan's waters, Jesus is driven by the Spirit into the wilderness. The word is εκβαλλω—and instead of a dove Mark's language conjures up the image of a hawk pursuing Jesus with talons at the ready.

**In Matthew's gospel as in Luke's**, the story of Jesus' wilderness temptation is told in riveting detail. But here in Mark, one verse says it all:

HE WAS IN THE WILDERNESS FORTY DAYS, TEMPTED BY SATAN;  
AND HE WAS WITH THE WILD BEASTS; AND THE ANGELS WAITED ON HIM.

Driven into the desert, Jesus comes out on the other side with a message and momentum that will carry him through his entire ministry.

Of the three accounts, Mark's seems the most honest to me. At those times when I've found myself in wilderness places, the journey there has always felt a lot more like being driven than being led.

For Jesus, going into the desert isn't a matter of wanting to or not, it's a matter of SAYING YES to God's will; it's a matter of obedience. If Jesus is to be God's instrument for bringing God's saving power to the world, then Jesus, like the prophets before him, must walk that desert road.

**And so he goes.** And for 40 days he practices saying YES to God and NO to everything NOT of God. And at the end of it, accompanied by wild beasts and attended by angels, he is prepared to go the full distance; to say YES to all that God has in store for him...even his own death and resurrection.

Jesus' experience is a signal all the baptized that aligning ourselves with the forces of Light is no guarantee of a trouble free life. On the contrary, saying YES to the Triune God heightens the probability that we will encounter resistance—and fiercely so.

I find it striking that in recent decades the RENUNCIATION OF EVIL within the baptism rite has returned to greater prominence.

DO YOU RENOUNCE THE DEVIL AND ALL THE FORCES THAT DEFY GOD?  
**I RENOUNCE THEM (that's your line...)**

DO YOU RENOUNCE THE POWERS OF THIS WORLD THAT REBEL AGAINST GOD?  
**I RENOUNCE THEM (once more, with feeling...)**

DO YOU RENOUNCE THE WAYS OF SIN THAT DRAW YOU FROM GOD?  
**I RENOUNCE THEM (our response should leave no doubt where we stand)**

**In the older liturgies of baptism (and in some used still today) this renunciation is accompanied by expectoration.**

A colleague shared, recently, a conversation she'd had with an Orthodox woman who was preparing for baptism at the Vigil. **How are you preparing?** she asked her.

**The woman's answer: "I'm working up a really big wad of spit."**

Mark doesn't tell us if Jesus spat at Satan during those 40 days in the wilderness but I can imagine it.

**Yet saying NO to the forces of darkness is only part of Jesus' purpose.**

**Emerging from the desert he begins to proclaim the nearness, the immediacy of God's reign, and to proclaim it not as THREAT but as GOOD NEWS.**

He gathers a community of apprentices around him. Men and women who would travel with him during his trek around the hills of Galilee, on to the hills of Judea and finally up to Jerusalem. And even though they falter, his resolve does not.

He will take his message to Jerusalem come hell or high water, and in the end, he gets both.

**This act of gathering isn't over even yet.** Jesus, through the Spirit, continues to gather followers today.

We are the very ones he uses to do the reaching, offer the welcome, grow the circle, live the promise.

We are not asked to follow Jesus as rugged individualists who can manage everything on their own, but as a community of people willing to share ourselves, willing to look for the Spirit of God in the stranger, in the neighbor, in the needy ones we encounter in our daily lives.

**The Holy Spirit has altered us from being people in need of help to people who must give it.**

**Yes, finally, the journey of Lent is a journey of community.**

**Christ stands even now, as the crucified and risen one, in the murky waters of our world, and he bids us follow. What will your response be?**