

Lent 1 Commentary – Interfaith Action of SW Florida

Deuteronomy 26: 1-11

When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, ² you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. ³ You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, "Today I declare to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us." ⁴ When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, ⁵ you shall make this response before the LORD your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. ⁶ When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, ⁷ we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. ⁸ The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; ⁹ and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰ So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me." You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God. ¹¹ Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house.

Luke 4: 1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ² where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³ The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." ⁴ Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" ⁵ Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸ Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" ⁹ Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰ for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' ¹¹ and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" ¹² Jesus

answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ¹³ When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

The Spirit Moves

Often we focus on Jesus' temptations in the wilderness and the fact that he is famished and possibly hallucinating. Jesus has the power not to give into the temptations. Jesus stands firm to reveal he truly is the Son of God. Yet, he is human and truly experiencing the pain of human reality in the wilderness.

This experience in the wilderness begs the question, "Why did Jesus go to the wilderness?" Luke tells us that the Spirit "drove him" or "led him" into the wilderness for forty days. Jesus' forty days in the wilderness undeniably reflects the forty years the Israelites spent in that place of fear and unrest, the wilderness (Deut. 6-8). And in both settings, God prevails over evil. Deuteronomistic teaching is laced with stories of how God responds to the cries of the oppressed, and so is the Gospel of Luke.

So, why was "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit... led by the Spirit in the wilderness?" (Lk. 4: 1) We must note that the Spirit is an acting force throughout Luke. The Spirit of the Lord comes upon Mary and the Son of God is born (Lk. 1:35). The Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus like a dove in his baptism (Lk. 3: 22). The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness (Lk 4:1) and when Jesus returns to Galilee he proclaims that the Spirit of the Lord is upon him, because he is anointed to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free. (Lk. 4: 18-19) And that is only the first four chapters!

As the Spirit moves Jesus we, too, are moved to the same mission, to be stirred by the oppression of the wilderness and led by the Spirit so that all will be released from slavery and experience a land flowing with milk and honey (Deut. 26: 9). Yet, the world looks very different today. The wilderness is a place most of us are able to avoid or admire from a safe distance on a boardwalk with rails. We have become separated from the life sustaining earth; there are days when our feet don't even touch the soil. We have become separated from the growing seasons; we just complain about the price tag of produce in off season. Therefore, we cannot deny that we have separated ourselves from the reality of injustice for those still in the wilderness.

We have separated the fruit we buy at our local grocer from the fruit that is directly picked off the vine. There is a very real fight in the fields of Florida to release the captives, who pick the fruit directly from the vine, as they are in the wilderness of modern day slavery. It is a fight for justice so the oppressed will receive a fair wage. The Spirit has come upon all those working

with Interfaith Action of Southwest Florida and The Coalition of Immokalee Workers as they strive for a day characterized by justice.

Though the cry to Publix has still gone unheard, the Spirit continues to drive more people into the wilderness to join in this fight. The Spirit of the LORD will be upon all who travel through the modern day wilderness from Lakeland to Tampa during the “Farmworker Freedom March” on April 16-18, 2010, so that one day soon those fighting for justice in the fields of Florida are led out of the wilderness by God’s mighty hand and outstretched arm! (Deut. 26: 8)

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