

Dawn's Senior Sermon

Friday, January 13, 2011

Sometimes tour companies promote destinations as places to “get lost” as visitors travel, explore and learn about their surroundings. Often, when our winter weather is bitterly cold, and not quite as mild as this winter, we wish to “get lost” on a beach. While “getting lost” sounds appealing in this sense, most of us feel uncomfortable when we think about being lost, especially in the wilderness.

In fact, we try very hard to prevent getting lost with our cell phones, GPS, maps and smart phones that incorporate all those gadgets into one device. However, we haven't always had these tools – and even with them, we can't always avoid getting lost.

I remember one day after a shopping trip at a nearby town, I decided to take a different route home through the countryside. I had no maps, no GPS and no cell phone at the time. Though I knew the weather was good, I was safe and that I would eventually reach familiar surroundings, I was anxious when my journey took longer and had different turns than I expected. Though we live in a society that values independent and self-sufficient individuals, I try to turn to God when I am lost in the wilderness.

In our scripture for today, the people of the Judean countryside and Jerusalem braved through the wilderness where John the Baptist was teaching and baptizing believers. By seeking him in the natural wilderness, they could face the emotional, societal, mental and/or psychological wildernesses that they may have had to deal with back home with the hope that

someone could give them guidance about being lost. John listened to them confess their sins and helped them receive the baptism.

Further, John baptized Jesus, too. Though Jesus was the son of God, he was baptized with water like other Christians. His baptism and relationship with God sustained him through his time when he was lost and Satan tempted him in the wilderness for forty days.

Satan appealed to what he hoped were Jesus' most vulnerable weaknesses in the wilderness – Jesus' physical desire of hunger, his emotional desire for security, and his psychological desire for power. Yet, Jesus denied him each time, attributing power and glory to his Father and taking refuge in his knowledge of God's Word and their relationship.

Though I don't often get physically lost, especially not in the wilderness, I have had my share of getting lost in other ways. Perhaps the most significant example leads back to the time before my own baptism. Since I was baptized at a little over a month old, I don't remember the event. However, the act of baptism has affected me ever since.

My baptism reminds me of my relationship with God. No matter what wilderness I find myself in, I know I'm not alone. As part of my relationship with God, I have to maintain it. Talking to God, praying and reflecting on his Word make me feel closer to him. Additionally, baptism reminds me that getting lost means eventually being found or finding my way. I believe each situation we go through will work itself out in the end, even if its way of working out wasn't exactly how you thought it might occur.

This reassurance has helped sustain me through other times I've been lost in modern wildernesses. I remember being nervous for my first day of Sunday school and preschool.

Similarly, I was nervous for my first day of college. Other times, I feel lost when I meet new people, go new places or try new activities.

Finally, I know that I have some getting lost to do in my future. As I look toward this spring, I realize that graduating college and moving to a new community, home and job could easily make the world seem like a vast wilderness.

In navigating these wildernesses is where I find it important to remember my baptism. Because the wilderness tempts us, it is easier to sin and make mistakes. However, the promise Jesus made us on the cross forgives my sins and washes me clean. I can move forward in the wilderness, maybe not confidently, but at least with less anxiety. I don't have to get lost alone – God will be there for me, protecting and guiding me. And if wilderness is everywhere, having God by my side is something I'm thankful for. Amen.