

March 6, 2022 Lent 1C

Luke 4:1-3

A Road Map for Lent

In the days before GPS and smartphones, whenever you started out on a journey, you looked at a road map. I remember as a boy scout, I was working on a merit badge and one of the requirements was that I had to plan the route for a trip our family was taking. We were going to the Florida Keys, so I had to map a route that took us from Memphis, Tennessee to Islamorada, Florida. That's when I learned what the different colored roads on the map meant, I learned about toll roads, and I learned that the shortest distance between two points is definitely not a straight line. The shortest distance between 2 points involves staying on major highways.

One thing about road maps—you have to be able to read them. I remember a trip we were taking with my aunt and uncle. My uncle was driving. My aunt was looking at the map trying to navigate our way around Chicago on our way from Memphis to Michigan for vacation. We were following in the car behind. My aunt thought she was reading the road map correctly and told my uncle to take the next exit, which he did. But because she was misreading the map, the next exit was for Chicago O'Hare airport, where in our confusion we wound up in the line for short-term parking and couldn't turn around. We wound up paying for short term parking, and I have to tell you, some words were exchanged and tempers flared and it while it may have been the most memorable part of our vacation, it was not the most pleasant. Road maps are important. Being able to read them are important.

Today we're starting out on a journey. The lessons for the first Sunday in Lent can be viewed as a roadmap for our Lenten journey. They embody the theme of journeying: travel, protection, and longing for a destination. If we look at each of them as Lenten guides, they will richly serve us through this season.

Deuteronomy talks about our heritage as spiritual children of a "wandering Aramean." People today throughout the world are on the move. And they have been for a while. Most, if not all of us, are here because our ancestors picked up from somewhere and made a big move across the Atlantic Ocean. We know that historically we are living through one of the

largest migrations of human beings ever witnessed. Our own tendency as Americans is to be uncomfortable with new races and cultures, yet our heritage was just that kind of migration to a land "flowing with milk and honey."

Our spiritual ancestors were wanderers, strangers, who found their Creator in the midst of the wilderness. So, is it not right that on this day, at the beginning of our own Lenten journey, we should remember that we were once strangers, immigrants, and wanderers?

The other theme in Deuteronomy is that of offering and celebration. It is perhaps odd that Lent would begin with that emphasis, but on this Sunday we are also asked to make an offering (ourselves) and celebrate (with the Lord's Supper) as a way of remembering how we can do both wherever we are. And, we are to make this offering and celebration fully aware of "the aliens who reside among us." Today, as we mark the beginning of Lent, let us reach out to the stranger, the one we don't know in Church, the people who have moved into the rental house across from us, and remember that God welcomes them, as he does us. Lent starts with an expanded community, not a select faithful few.

Psalm 91 is a favorite of many--even the devil, who quotes part of it to Jesus during the forty days in the wilderness. It is important to note that Hebrew thought didn't make much of distinction between body and soul. The promises of protection in this Psalm are not physical charms to keep us safe. They are, rather, promises based on a relationship with God that will always be there, regardless of what happens to us. "Because he is bound to me in love, therefore will I deliver him; I will protect him because he knows my name."

Because of our relationship with God, strengthened by our Baptism, we are safe to venture forth.

In our Lenten journey we approach others with the stance that everyone who calls on the Lord will be saved. Our Lenten journey will be a generous one, extending graciousness and forgiveness. This is truly a time to put away differences and distinctions, whether they are religious, political, or personal. Spiritual travel to a new place has to start with some new premises, and one is surely that the truth is not just found in one church or one point of view. God has always found ways to mix us up with one another so we can be shaped and formed in God's image--- not our own.

The gospel reading from Luke (4:1-13) depicts Jesus' physical and spiritual journey in the wilderness. Those who have visited the Holy Land know there are, even today, vast areas of wilderness in which one could easily get lost and die from thirst or hunger. Most of us have not experienced that kind of deprivation in our lives. Our "wilderness" today might be the Internet, or the Mall of America! Strange to think of places of plenty as wildernesses, but what they promise and offer never truly fill our longing and craving.

The three temptations are ours as well. Commanding stones to become bread is the temptation to make something into what it was never intended to be. Stones are stones, and bread is bread. Making sexual objects out of people comes to mind as a modern example. People are not objects, but when we make them into idols and objects they become less than human.

Offering power over the things we don't control is the second temptation. There are moments when we would all like to run the world, but this temptation is more subtle than that. Much of modern success and motivation is based on how to get others to do our bidding. We can look better, feel better, and learn to think better all with the objective of getting what we want. Jesus' reply to that is to expose the humbug in it and remind us to worship the Lord, and serve only him. Anything else is a waste of time, his and ours.

We've already spoken about the third temptation, of being protected from suffering and harm. It is not for nothing that Jesus journeys to Jerusalem and faces the worst evils we know: betrayal, beating, and crucifixion. Jesus' journey stands as a stark reminder that our Lenten journey is not soft or quiet. We are always faced with contradiction and suffering. But in the recesses of our minds, in the time of our faithful prayer, we know that because Jesus did do these things for us we are never far from his gracious help and goodness.

At the heart of the city of London is a landmark called Charing Cross. All distances across the city are measured from its central point. Locals refer to it simply as "the cross." One day a child became lost in the bustling metropolis. A city police officer (A "bobby," as they are referred to in London) came to the child's aid to try and help him return to his family.

The bobby asked the child a variety of questions in an attempt to discover where the boy lived, to no avail. Finally, with tears streaming down the

boy's face, he said, "*If you will take me to the cross I think I can find my way from there.*" What an apt description of the Christian life. The cross is both the starting place of our new life in Christ, but also the place we must return to, time and again, to keep our bearings in life.

So our Lenten journey begins. May it be one of honesty for each one of us. May it be one that expands our horizons and connects with others unlike ourselves. May it be a journey grounded in our Baptismal relationship with Jesus, one that builds up our dignity and that of others. May it be one that helps us to learn that in Jesus we are never powerless, but that in walking the road to Calvary with him, each one will find him mighty to save.