

March 11-17, 2018

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Sunday, March 11

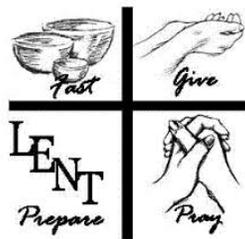
Text: Romans 8:38-39

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

For Lent we have been wandering around aimlessly at the churches that I serve. And yes, you read that right, our focus for our midweek services is aimless wandering. You know, that moment when you go into a room to do something or get something and you forgot why you went into that room and you end up wandering around trying to remember what you forgot? Or that moment you can't remember where you put your cup of coffee or your keys or (fill in the blank) and you wander around aimlessly trying to remember when you put it? Yeah, that's the kind of aimless wandering I'm talking about.

When we are wandering in the wilderness it can be hard to see God; however, God is still there walking alongside you. Just because you can't see Him, feel Him near, or feel as if He's silent doesn't mean that He's not there. God is closer than you think. No matter what you face, the gift of faith you have received, the Holy Spirit who dwells in you, faces it with you. You never walk alone.

Prayer: *Jesus, you know what it's like to wander in the wilderness. Help me to see that you are with me every step of the way and help me cling to the promise that you will never leave. Amen.*



Monday, March 12

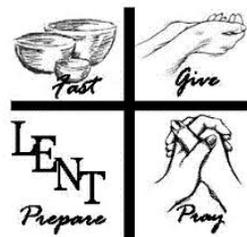
Text: Numbers 14:1-4

That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt."

When it comes to our faith, there are many things that can lead us into wandering around aimlessly; blinding us from seeing that the God who loves and cares for us is walking alongside of us. This is the case for the Israelites. God has led them to the promised land, the land flowing with milk and honey. However, when they get to the border they send out spies who report back that the people are too big and the enemies will crush them. The Israelites are afraid, and their fear leads them to wandering for 40 years in the desert (not because Moses didn't know how to ask for directions).

Fear leads to aimless wandering. How many times have you not done something you should have or felt called to do out of fear? How many times have you turned the other direction and have run away because of fear? How often have you ever been fearful and in that fear you can no longer see that God is with you? The Bible says to not be afraid 365 times. That's enough times to let you know all year long that you have no reason to be afraid. Not because things aren't scary but because God is bigger than all those things and He is with you always.

Prayer: *Forgive me for the times my fear has kept me from being the person you called me to be. Forgive me for the times my fear has kept me from seeing that you will always go with me. Give me courage to stand up in the face of fear and the eyes to see that you go before me so I don't need to be afraid. Amen.*



Tuesday, March 13

Text: Genesis 32:24-28

So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

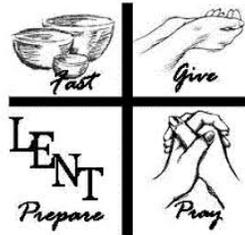
Remember the 80's? Remember the big hair, the fashions, the music, the video games, remember all the pop culture? The 1980's were arguably a decade that saw huge leaps and advancements in many ways. During this time, we came to know a now iconic movie "*Back to the Future*," where this kid goes back in time and ends up trying to influence the future by making changes to the past. If you could go back and do or choose differently, in order to positively affect the life you lead now, would you do it?

Jacob might have wished to have that opportunity. He is left alone as he is heading back to his homeland where his brother has been living. This is the same brother from whom Jacob stole his inheritance and the family's blessing. Jacob who deceived his father by pretending to be

someone he wasn't to receive the blessing is now heading back to face his past, and as a result ends up wrestling with God, and walks away with a limp and a new name as a result.

Many of us have pasts we want to run away from or at the very least bury deep so we don't have to face it, but when we run from our past or remain stuck in it, it can lead us to wandering aimlessly in a place where nothing can change or living in a foreign land pretending to be something we're not. We don't have the benefit of a DeLorean time machine where we can change the past and erase any regrets we might have. However, God isn't content with us living in the past and confronts us with it, and when he does it can be like a wrestling match and it can also hurt. However, in that wrestling God also takes that past, redeems it, and gives you a new identity; one that sets you free from it and an identity that is not defined by your past but instead by the God who calls you His own.

Prayer: *You know me completely Lord, and you know my past. Forgive for me for the times I have failed to measure up to be the person you created me to be. Help me to face the things I have been running away from and lead me into this new identity that I find in you.*



Wednesday, March 14

Text: 1 Kings 19:3-5

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

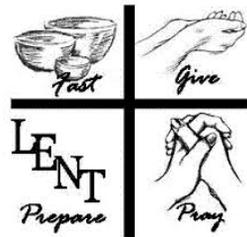
Have you ever been depressed? Now I'm not talking only about clinical depression, but also those moments where we experience tragedy and loss within our own lives. A kind of depression that sets in that leaves things seeming bleak and dark. There was a movie that came out in the 1980's called *The Neverending Story*. In this movie, the hero Atreyu is sent on an adventure to stop the Nothing from destroying everything. On his journey, he and his horse Artax must travel through the Swamps of Sadness. While journeying through this swamp, his horse Artax becomes overcome with sadness and does nothing but get swallowed up by the swamp. Despite this being traumatic for any little kid watching (me), it also speaks to a great truth. Depression can swallow you up in the muck and leave you with no fight left in you; leave you wandering aimlessly through the darkness without seeing anyway out.

This is Elijah's world right now. Despite God showing His true power to all of Israel and in front of all the prophets of Baal, here is Elijah running for his life and he is completely depressed. He cries out to God, "Just end it now," lays down, and falls asleep hoping to never

wake up. Depression has swallowed him up and he has given up on everything. Even though he has just witnessed God's power and God's presence, he has been sucked up into the darkness unable to see anything good; even God.

Here's the thing though, God doesn't give up on Elijah. He still calls him; He still tends to him; He never leaves him alone. In fact, God shows up in the sound of sheer silence and speaks to him. God shows up in the darkness and speaks words of life to him. God does the same to all His children. You are not alone in the darkness; you don't need to wander aimlessly. It can be hard to see. It can be hard to believe. It can be hard to have hope in the pit of depression. If you can relate to Elijah, then know this, you matter to God. He's near and He's speaking to you right now. God will never give up on you.

Prayer: (*silence for three minutes; take deep breaths in and out*) You gave me this breath O Lord. Continue to show up in my life; reveal Yourself to me. Remind me in your own way that I am not alone. (*silence for three minutes; take deep breaths*) Amen.



Thursday, March 15

Text: Luke 2:51-52

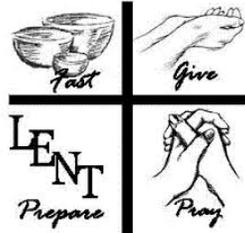
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

How many of you ask for directions when you get lost or are you the type, like me, who lets your pride get in the way and you refuse to ask? "Pride cometh before the fall." When you think of someone who is prideful, what are the thoughts that come to mind? When I do this exercise, I think of someone who is arrogant, nose up in the air, and carrying an "I am better than you" attitude. Most of the images that come to my mind are usually not favorable.

When we get to the Bible and the prideful, the image is pretty much the same. It's not the prideful who are lifted up; it's the humble. Why is this? It's because pride in its own sense says, "I don't need God." That on my own, I am okay; that I can do this on my own. Pride, in itself, says that God is not needed.

Now maybe you don't brag about how great you are. Maybe you don't put your nose up in the air and act snobbish. Maybe you don't think of yourself as the greatest thing since sliced bread. But how often do we put more trust in ourselves, our own abilities, and our own strength instead of God? How often in what we say and do, do we live as if we don't need God? How often are we left wandering aimlessly simply because we are too prideful to ask for directions.

Prayer: *God, I too often live my life as if I don't need You. I live as if I can do things and make it on my own. The truth is that I need You; Your help, Your guidance, and the life only You can give. Help me to live my life today asking for Your help. Amen.*



Friday, March 16

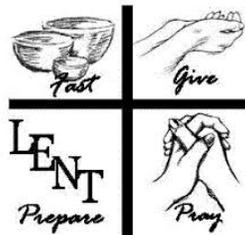
Text: Psalm 51:10-12

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

At this point David is wandering aimlessly in shame and guilt. When this Psalm is written it is after David is confronted by the prophet Nathan. David had really messed up. He had slept with another man's wife, got her pregnant, and in order to cover his tracks had her husband killed. David is now confronted with the full weight of his sin and as he wanders in his shame and guilt, he finally comes before God to take this burden from him.

If pride says that I am okay and have no need of God, then the flip-side to that same coin is shame and guilt. Shame and guilt says that I am so bad that God can't help me. I'm simply too far gone and am beyond saving. However, this could be furthest from the truth. There is nothing in this world that God can't redeem; there is nothing that God can't save. No matter who you are and no matter what you've done, you are welcome at the table. You are never outside of God's reach, and in God's eyes you are someone worth giving everything up for.

Prayer: *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Your presence and take not Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and uphold me with Your free Spirit. Amen*



Saturday, March 17

Text: Romans 5:6-8

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone

might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

We are people who wander aimlessly. We get lost and we go without asking for directions in hopes that we can find our way out. We end up putting trust in ourselves and our own abilities before trusting God. We wander through a wilderness of our own making or through the wilderness of others' actions on us. Thankfully, God doesn't give up on us. He enters into our wilderness, whatever it may be and walks alongside of us. God's love is greater than any of our mistakes, bigger than any of our faults, and God is patient with every single one of us no matter how stubborn we may be. He bears our burdens; He bears our sin on the cross. Not because we have gotten it right; not because we deserve it; not because we can make it out on our own. Simply because He loves us and doesn't want to see us wander aimlessly. May you see yourself as someone who has value; as someone worth dying for. May you find who you are in God's love and sacrifice, and may you find purpose in the midst of your wandering.

Prayer: *As this week comes to an end, thank you for never leaving my side. Be with me as I continue to journey through this life, and when I wander away, walk alongside me and lead me back to where I am supposed to be. Amen.*

