

Sermon  
Lent One-B  
Saint Andrew's, Methuen  
February 21, 2021  
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Genesis 9:8-17  
Psalm 25:1-9  
1 Peter 3:18-22  
Mark 1:9-15

You will have noticed that Mark's account of the temptation of Jesus is much shorter than the one in Luke and Matthew, which describe Jesus's three temptations.

But Mark's account has its own stunning detail when he writes, "The Spirit immediately **drove, not led as in Matthew and Luke, drove** Jesus into the wilderness.

If going into the desert for 40 days is not an option for Jesus then surely it must be **a spiritual necessity for you and me.**

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Yet 2000 years later do we think of Lent as a spiritual necessity or as dreary time when we give up Alleluias and sing music in a minor key, all the while the ashes remind us of our impending appointment with the grave or the crematorium.

Father John Behr, warns against this view of Lent in a sermon to his Eastern Orthodox his seminary students:

He says:

"it would be a mistake to think about the gift of Lent...in terms of dietary ingredients, church attendance, extra prayers ...or even about something as crucial and obligatory as giving to the poor....And to dutifully perform all of them...and still be left at the end of Lent... **at the core of our being unchanged—no more loving, no more joyful, no more thankful; in short, no more godly than when we began.**" Behr page 31

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But what if Lent is meant to be 40 days, not of dreary dullness but of transformation? **After all, these 40 days in the ancient church were used to awaken their newest members to the glory of life in a Jesus-shaped community that is plugged into the Spirit of God.**

But here's the thing: are we willing to do the work in order to belong **to a Jesus-shaped community plugged into the Spirit of God?**

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Philosopher Ken Wilber says there are four essential aspects to such a community in the Spirit:

**First there is Growing up:** as toddlers we were in the egocentric stage—life is only about us. As teens we **grow-up** to the ethnocentric stage—with life about We: my family, my people, my nation.

Unfortunately, some stay stuck at the ethnocentric stage, and never grow beyond Christian Nationalism.

But when we learn to trust in a God who is bigger than our nation, we **grow-up** to the world-centric stage, in which our hearts are connected to all people, all nations.

And then, with grace, maybe we **grow-up** into the cosmos-centric stage which is universal love for all that is.

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In addition of Growing Up there is also the process of **Waking up:** this is where we wake-up from only being aware of our body-mind, to being aware of our soul which is larger, and then **waking-up** to the realm of Spirit, the Ground of Being, Universal Spirit, Triune God.

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In Christ as we apply ourselves to growing-up and waking-up, we will be led to the process called **Showing-up:** which is to engage the world as a loving and authentic human being, who, like Jesus, lives for others.

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But in order to make progress in **growing up and waking up and showing-up** there is a critical process, a Lenten process, Wilber calls **cleaning up—where** we deal with the darkness or the shadow inside each of us.

Jesus goes into the desert to face his inner darkness—those parts of himself that want to be famous, special, or a superhero, instead of a loving son and servant of God.

Jesus calls us to **cleaning-up** our inner reality when he says in the Sermon on the Mount: “How can you say to your neighbor,<sup>[b]</sup> ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? <sup>5</sup> You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s<sup>[c]</sup> eye.”

What Jesus is urging us to **clean-up** is our psychological projection, in which we project our issues—my anger, lust, greed—my inner darkness—onto others. If we don’t clean-up then we spend our lives continually pointing out others’ specks and ignore our logs and creating a community or

a nation that demonizes the Jews, or Black, Brown, or Asian people, or Gays or Trans people.

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Lent is a time to join Jesus in the wilderness and practice cleaning-up.

And how might we do that? One process that I find enormously helpful I had to practice this week. I was having an innocuous conversation with Stephanie, who is also a priest, about, of all things, the Annual Parochial Report which every church is struggling to fill out for the diocese and the national church. And as she talked about how she goes about this, I found myself getting angry. But why? It was totally irrational.

So I go back to my study and do a simple three-step process in which you Face it, talk to it and be it.

So first I **face it** and acknowledge this anger is mine and doesn't belong anybody but me.

"It's me oh Lord in the need of Prayer."

Then I **talk to it**: I literally pull over an empty chair and put my anger in that chair and talk to it: What's going on? Why is it angry? And listen for the answers.

Then, I Be It": which means I put myself in the empty chair and talk as my anger.

This can all be done in five minutes and it can be done in your head, but what it does is take my attention off the speck in another's eye and onto the log in my own.

My spiritual director does a similar process she calls "having tea with your shadow."

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Growing-up, Waking-up, and Cleaning-Up lead to Showing-up, but as I tried to say on Ash Wednesday, the foundation for the spiritual life comes not from our efforts, but from what God is continually doing for us in Jesus Christ: **the Spirit doesn't drive Jesus into the wilderness until after his baptism** in which he is flooded with the Spirit and hears God say directly to him: "you are my beloved—with you I am well-pleased."

So too, our spiritual journey only works when each morning we hank God for flooding us with the Spirit and hear God say to us: "You are my beloved, with you I am well-pleased."

This is the beginning and end of the life of Faith. And in the middle we grow-up, wake-up, clean-up, and show-up as member of the Jesus-shaped community plugged into the Spirit of God.