

Lenten Field Guide // Week 1: On Doing Hard Things

This Lenten season, Pastor Paul will be walking us through an in-depth look at the story of Jesus going into the desert, fasting, and experiencing temptation by the devil. Each week, this scripture found in Matthew will be present in the Lenten sermons and the Field Guides will be focused on this text where the Holy Spirit leads Jesus into a wilderness space. It is no surprise that Jesus is in the physical wilderness; he quiets himself and matches the landscape so that he may focus on prayer and resisting temptation. Consider that perhaps Jesus needed this trial to prepare his heart, body, and mind for the horror of what he was soon to endure down the Via Dolorosa to the cross at Golgotha.

It is hard to find anything redemptive about suffering. Some suffering may not have anything redemptive about it. Chris Stapleton's recent song, *Broken Halos*, says it well:

“Seen my share of broken halos,
Folded wings that used to fly...
Don't go looking for the reasons
Don't go asking Jesus why
We're not meant to know the answers
They belong to the by and by”

Some answers just belong to the by and by. And that's okay. And, at the same time, sometimes the trials that come into our lives develop within us a deeper well, which hopefully will contain empathy for others because we ourselves know what pain feels like. This well will also hopefully develop in us the strength to live into our powerful baptismal vows, to actively resist evil, injustice, and oppression in the world.

In times of trial and temptation, it is very difficult to step back and see the new work that God is doing or maybe what we are being prepared for, but resting in the knowledge that the work is going on, even when you cannot see it, is comforting. Maybe these are birth pains of a greater good, deeper justice, and path to becoming your best self. Vulnerability and shame researcher, Dr. Brene Brown says: “I think our capacity for wholeheartedness can never be greater than our willingness to be broken-hearted. It means engaging with the world from a place of vulnerability and worthiness.”

Scripture to consider: Matthew 4:1-11

“Then the Spirit led Jesus up into the wilderness so that the devil might tempt him. ²After Jesus had fasted for forty days and forty nights, he was starving. ³The tempter came to him and said, “Since you are God’s Son, command these stones to become bread.”⁴ Jesus replied, “It’s written, *People won’t live only by bread, but by every word spoken by God.*”⁵ After that the devil brought him into the holy city and stood him at the highest point of the temple. He said to him, ⁶“Since you are God’s Son, throw yourself down; for it is written, *I will command my angels concerning you, and they will take you up in their hands so that you won’t hit your foot on a stone.*”⁷ Jesus replied, “Again it’s written, *Don’t test the Lord your God.*”⁸ Then the devil brought him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹He said, “I’ll give you all these if you bow down and worship me.”¹⁰ Jesus responded, “Go away, Satan, because it’s written, *You will worship the Lord your God and serve only him.*”¹¹ The devil left him, and angels came and took care of him.

Journeying through Lent with Children:

Consider bringing your child(ren) to our Ash Wednesday service tonight! Chapel Choir will be singing two songs, and younger children will meet with choir teachers and come in closer to the end of the service. All children are welcome for any or all of this important service. If you can't attend tonight's service, take some time to talk with your child(ren) about what Ash Wednesday means.

When we receive ashes, it is a mark that we know that we belong to God and that there is nothing that we can do or can't do in life that will keep us from belonging to God and being loved by God. Some days, we know in our minds that we are loved by God, but on this day, you get to see with your eyes that you are loved by God.

Notice that we do not use golden markers to mark the cross on our foreheads, but instead we use messy black ashes. The ashes are messy for a reason; they remind us that we mess up too sometimes and make mistakes. And that's okay. Adults make mistakes too. Part of living is learning how to learn from those mistakes and to ask for forgiveness.

Acts of Worship: This week on Wednesday the 26th, join us for a centering service of ashes on Ash Wednesday in the sanctuary at 6:15pm. We'll eat dinner, then sing, remember that we came from dust and to dust we will return, and receive ashes in community. Also, consider joining us in our Sunday worship services either at 8:15am or 10:30am.

Acts of Devotion and Spirituality: Consider joining a small group this Lent. Pastor Heather will be leading a group centered on: *Simplifying the Soul: Lenten Practices to Renew Your Spirit* beginning February 26th at 10am and continuing on Wednesday mornings through Lent.

Acts of Justice and Resistance: Consider work that Belmont is connected to and if you are feeling called to get involved: [Tennesseans Against the Death Penalty](#)

Acts of Mercy: Consider work that Belmont is connected to and if you are feeling called to get involved: Homebound and hospital visitation, [Room in the Inn](#), [Luke 14:12](#).