

**“Walking Through Lent”**

Meditation Preached by The Rev. Jennifer Cameron

March 6, 2022 – St. Columba Presbyterian Church, Belleville

**Scripture Texts: Isaiah 40:3-11**

<sup>3</sup> A voice cries out:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

<sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.

<sup>5</sup> Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,  
and all people shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

<sup>6</sup> A voice says, “Cry out!”

And I said, “What shall I cry?”

All people are grass,  
their constancy is like the flower of the field.

<sup>7</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades,  
when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;  
surely the people are grass.

<sup>8</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades;  
but the word of our God will stand forever.

<sup>9</sup> Get you up to a high mountain,  
O Zion, herald of good tidings;  
lift up your voice with strength,  
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,  
lift it up, do not fear;

say to the cities of Judah,  
“Here is your God!”

<sup>10</sup> See, the Lord God comes with might,  
and his arm rules for him;  
his reward is with him,  
and his recompense before him.

<sup>11</sup> He will feed his flock like a shepherd;  
he will gather the lambs in his arms,  
and carry them in his bosom,  
and gently lead the mother sheep.

**Luke 3:1-6**

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, <sup>2</sup> during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup> He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, <sup>4</sup> as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.

<sup>5</sup> Every valley shall be filled,  
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,  
and the crooked shall be made straight,  
and the rough ways made smooth;

<sup>6</sup> and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

**Meditation**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

As we begin the season of Lent this year, we may do so with different expectations, a different kind of anticipation for the weeks ahead. This forty-day stretch of time reminds us of the stories of Jesus as he made his way toward Jerusalem, toward the cross that would fulfill the purpose for which God sent him into the world. We normally begin with the story of Jesus being tempted by Satan in the wilderness, and the Lord’s resolve in standing firm in God’s Word.

But this year is different – again. This year, our Lenten journey looks different because we are starting from a different place – again. Because we are beginning this season as we emerge from the isolation and restriction of the pandemic, we take these first steps together with hope, even a little tentatively because we worry if we will be able to stay open, to continue worshipping with each other side by side instead of screen to screen. However, Lent is a journey toward the source of our hope – the events of Holy Week, Good Friday, and the resurrected Christ, and no matter how we get there, that is the destination we must keep in mind.

This year, given the situation in which we find ourselves, we are going to do things a little differently in terms of how we think about Lent, how we reflect on the Scriptures together. First, I came across a devotion series for the season, produced by the Presbyterian Church USA. It follows a poem written by a Spanish poet as he thinks about the journey as a walk along a path that isn’t in front of us – not as we normally recognize it. I am going to be sharing these devotions with you each Sunday, reflecting on how it speaks to me, to this congregation, to our new normal that is a post-pandemic world. I realize the pandemic isn’t actually over, and I don’t think the virus is going to disappear anytime soon, so we must adapt to a new way of living and worshipping. Let me begin with a reading of the poem, followed by the first of the writer’s series

of devotions. The writer is the Rev. Teri McDowell Ott and she is the editor of the Presbyterian Outlook magazine.

Walker - Antonio Machado<sup>1</sup>

Walker, your footsteps  
are the road, and nothing more.  
Walker, there is no road,  
the road is made by walking.  
Walking you make the road,  
and turning to look behind  
you see the path you never  
again will step upon.  
Walker, there is no road,  
only foam trails on the sea.

“John the Baptist typically kicks off the season of Advent, proclaiming our need to repent in preparation for the birth of Christ. But [Rev. McDowell Ott] turns to Luke 3 to begin our 2022 Lenten journey. This devotion series is based on the Spanish poet Antonio Machado’s poem “Walker.” Machado writes: “Walker, there is no road, the road is made by walking.” This line resonates because it feels as if there is no road in front of us. The soil of our well-worn Lenten path has been overturned by the pandemic. If we want to follow Christ this Lent, we’ll need to prepare the way and make the road. We’ll need to rethink and recreate our Lenten practices. The poem’s phrase, “The road is made by walking,” suggests that there is no road forward until we take the steps to create it. It’s up to me, the walker, to forge the path. So, we will walk with Jesus this Lent, keeping in mind that faith was never meant to be a destination, but a journey — a never-ending, creating and recreating, dying to the old and rising to the new, walk with Christ. Let us step forward this Lent, doing the spiritual work of straightening the crooked paths, filling in the valleys of despair, removing the rough and mountainous obstacles so that, come Easter, we shall see the salvation of God.”<sup>2</sup>

I was so happy when the Session made the decision to re-open the sanctuary and when the province lifted restrictions so that we can gather with fewer protocols in place. We can sing (as long as we’re masked), we can celebrate the sacrament in person, and we can make the journey toward the cross and the empty tomb together. We are so happy to be together again. However, the joy fell off a bit when I realized how much work I had ahead of me. We still won’t pass the elements of the Lord’s Table to each other. Lent practices look different. Maundy Thursday will be a challenge to provide Communion. John and I will have to be creative to draw out the meaning of the season for everyone. Add to this the appearance of Covid in my household forcing us all to isolate, meaning my recordings and the return to worship in the

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<sup>1</sup> Antonio Machado, trans. Willis Barnstone from *Antonio Machado, Border of a Dream: Selected Poems*, Copper Canyon Press, 2004

<sup>2</sup> “Making the Road” A Lenten series of devotions written by the Rev. Teri-McDowell Ott, Editor of Presbyterian Outlook magazine, Presbyterian Church USA, 2022. This reading is the devotion for March 6, 2022.

sanctuary this weekend got derailed. I am very grateful to my friend Ted for stepping in to lead worship and preside over the Sacrament in the sanctuary, and the grace with which he said he would help. He also is being placed on a path he didn't expect to walk this week. But I'm feeling rather cheated out of being with my congregation on this first Sunday back together. As I look forward, my own journey through Lent has begun with some bumps right at the start. Perhaps you feel your path is getting off to a bumpy start too, because we all encounter obstacles that change our plans, that interrupt the path we think we should be on.

Then I read the first devotion in this Lenten series, and was caught by a line toward the end: *So, we will walk with Jesus this Lent, keeping in mind that faith was never meant to be a destination, but a journey — a never-ending, creating and recreating, dying to the old and rising to the new, walk with Christ.* My whining about things not going as planned came to an abrupt halt as I realized I'm already on the never-ending, creating and recreating, dying to the old and rising to the new, walk with Christ. The path isn't my own, it's the one I am called to follow.

Which leads me to the second part of what we will be sharing throughout this season of Lent.

St. Andrew's Hall at Vancouver School of Theology is one of our Canadian Presbyterian Seminaries. The Hall has produced a Lenten Devotion Guide, and each day provides a reading written by someone in the St. Andrew's Hall community. I received this guide from the Rev. Dr. Ross Lockhart, Dean of the Hall. Each Sunday, as we reflect together on the devotions that forge a new kind of path through Lent, we will also share these insightful readings, written from a perspective of learning and the development of missional faith. Where the devotions from Teri McDowell Ott begin with the Scriptural foundation that normally kicks off the season of Advent, the St. Andrew's Hall reflections remind us of the foundational stories upon which the church has traditionally walked in the season of Lent. The different approaches and views come together in Christ, who is the destination toward whom we make this faithful journey.

The first of the St. Andrew's devotions is written by the Rev. Dr. Stephen Farris, Dean Emeritus of St. Andrew's Hall and Professor Emeritus of Homiletics at VST, and a friend of St. Columba from many years ago. He begins with Luke 4:1-2... *Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.*

"Normally we read the story of the temptation of Jesus as a lesson for Christian individuals. We will all face temptation and Jesus shows us how we can withstand it. But perhaps we can read it a little differently. In the first place, the temptations faced by Jesus as he is about to begin his public ministry are specific to his work as Messiah. We all do face temptations but normally not the kind we see here. Maybe that phrase "public ministry" gives us a clue. The public ministry of Jesus continues in the mission not just of individuals but in the church. The church is the "Body of Christ" and as such it carries on his ministry. So does the church face temptations and can it resist them?

"One temptation not mentioned in this story is the temptation to do nothing or nothing out of the ordinary. The ones mentioned here are enough for today, however. The church is

tempted by the desire to have “bread,” our needs met, especially if we have been short of bread for some time.

“We can focus mainly on the needs of the church, not its mission. In church history a very successful temptation has been the offer of authority for the church. We may work mainly to preserve or extend that authority. Or we are tempted to use spectacular means to achieve good ends. “Throw yourselves down!” But the end doesn’t justify the means in Christ’s mission.

“Jesus resists temptation by turning to Scripture. Note that it isn’t just quoting scripture; the Devil can do that very well. It’s a matter of using Scripture rightly, for good ends. And perhaps that is our main task as we follow the Master to Golgotha, to use these days to learn again to interpret scriptures faithfully and well.”

As we make this journey together, whether it looks familiar, different, challenging, or comforting, we do so on the foundation of Scripture. We model Jesus’ response to temptation, evil, and sin as we turn to and rest in the Word of God to guide and direct the path ahead of us. That path is a new one this year, as we must forge a new way forward. But we do not do this alone. We do not do this from our own strength, our own plan. We do this on the strength of faith, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, with the same destination ahead – the cross and the empty tomb. As we walk together, the road may not feel the same under our feet, but it leads us on the right path, for the name and sake of the resurrected Jesus – our hope.

Let us pray.

“God our Companion, the future is uncertain, and we stand poised before this season of Lent, unsure of this journey that feels altogether new. As we step into this 40-day journey, help us make a road that is straight and sure and free of obstacles. Help us make a road for ourselves and others that leads us to the salvation you offer to all weary travelers. Amen.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> McDowell Ott