

Lent, Day 2
Thursday, March 7, 2019

Revelation 1:9–20

My colleague, Calvin, reminded me today that a major theme of lent is the wilderness. Being a mainly city kid I don't have a big understanding of the wilderness. I know for some it conjures pictures of mountain climbing or white water rafting. None of that appeals to me. Biblically, I envision a dry, desert-like place. I assume not many of us would want to spend much time there. Yet, the wilderness is an appropriate metaphor for entering into the season of lent.

This sense of wilderness is something that both John, the seer who writes this book, and the seven churches understand. Notice in verse nine that John describes himself as a fellow partaker in the tribulation, kingdom, and perseverance in Jesus. N. T. Wright gives a disturbing comment on this saying, "Jesus himself won the victory through his suffering, and so must his people."¹ Lent is about intentionally walking into the wilderness.

However, this isn't entering into a place of despair by any means. Think back to Israel's time in the wilderness, or Elijah's, or Jesus's. The theme of wilderness is the theme of preparation. This is also what is happening in the book of Revelation. These seven churches, and you and I, are being prepared through this letter to stand firm during difficult times in the church. Lent is a time of preparation.

Looking at Jesus's time in the wilderness, it was after his baptism where God spoke words of identity, purpose, and love over Jesus. He was then led into the wilderness by the Spirit of God. This was a time to have that identity proved in order to make it solid. No less for us. When we follow the leading to enter into the wilderness we are being proved. It is a process, like Israel, of having what is false or inappropriate removed from us. It is a place of stripping, but more importantly a receiving of what is true. We will come out of the wilderness a different person than who went in.

This is so because, like John on the island of Patmos, we encounter the living Christ in the wilderness. He is the one who meets us and speaks to us. In his speaking we are laid bare and made new. He is the one who holds the keys of death and Hades. We need not fear the wilderness. John paints a picture of Jesus, both powerful and gentle. He does speak with a sword but that is to part the false from what is true. The one who truly seeks life need not be afraid of the death in the wilderness.

Prayer

Living voice please speak even if the power of your voice frightens us and your appearance make us tremble. Lead us into your wilderness so we may find you and in finding you we might find our true selves.

¹ N. T. Wright, *Revelation for Everyone* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 10.