

Vestry, March 1, 2009

Lent 1B, Genesis 9:8-17; Ps. 25:1-9; 1Peter 3:18-22; Mark1:9-15

Today's gospel marks the inauguration of Jesus' ministry as he wades in the waters of baptism. The Spirit of God drives him from the water into the wilderness place where there is testing and blessing. He emerges from that time ready to proclaim the nearness of the kingdom of God., urging those around him to turn toward the Good News.

This parish will renew its baptismal faith today and each week of our Lenten pilgrimage as we celebrate the good news of a God who has sustained us in the wilderness, turning and returning to a faith filled proclamation. We celebrate what is right in our world, with all that has emerged in this last year of parish life.

We celebrate:

- Leaders who helped navigate a breach of trust
- Those who produced a document on thefts in parishes to help others
- Beasts at the Feast of St. Francis
- Angels hovering at a quiet day, evening prayer services, in our musicians and dancers
- Joy in the presentation of instant pageants
- Shared stories in study books and in the ministry chapters of our own lives beyond this house of worship into the houses of need
- Adding new faces, releasing others
- Making art, sending peace cranes to rest in our Christmas trees, announcing in Aboriginal colored prayer flags our hopes for the world, letting in even more light in banners
- Strengthening our ties to our diocese with guests and participation in diocesan programs
- The amazing grace project with the national church
- A new banner of welcome and mailed invitations to church
- An updated website
- Enough money to purchase a camcorder
- Healing circles, ministry circles
- Support for a mission trip to Louisiana

There are ongoing ministries too, the everyday and often thankless times of baking pies, making coffee, running a bazaar, staffing services in nursing homes, cards and calls of concern, celebrating lives at funerals, welcoming a new baby in baptism, church school lessons and children with generous hearts, faithful readers and servers and prayers, studyers, singers, rehearsers. I am amazed at the ways in which you celebrate the faith in your lives. In all these things and more, in committees and task forces, maintaining inside and outside this part of God's kingdom, you are part of what is right with this world.

I have been here now for 11 months, coming out of my own experience of wilderness, driven by the Spirit, being ministered to by angels....there were some beasts. Of course I

am grateful that you took me in, beyond the decision of the search committee, beyond all the differences that I bring – as a woman, not Canadian (but you're growing on me), as a member of a minority group that some love to hate. You have allowed me to breathe over your good bones and to watch you enfleshed and rising. I brought some ideas, which most of you have met with good humor or at least a 'wait and see' attitude, especially in liturgy where I hoped we could sing together in spirit with the One who has drawn us all in. You are teaching me what it means to be your priest and your rector.

Your new council will set some goals and already we have identified the need for a new parish mission statement, voiced into being by the work of all of us. We need a better communications strategy, some work toward our bishop's visit in the fall and our parish anniversary two years from now. We are looking forward to working together this coming year.

Our challenge is always to be agents of the Good News ourselves. We are in the process of reaching out more, raising money for our new budget and the payment of our full fair share to the diocese which means that all of the baptized will be needed to share time, talent and treasure. You are the ones whose journey is about relationship with God and with neighbor. You have survived the wilderness time; you are fulfilling God's yearning for proclaiming what is offered in Christ's name, a spiritual community that welcomes, cares, meets, embraces all.

Amen+ The Rev. Dr. Linda Privitera