

Lent 2019

Stepping Stones

Week One – *Where God Dwells*

Monday, March 11th

Jim Pierce

“Let’s Go to Where God Lives”

The theme summary for Pastor Lenander’s 2019 Lenten Sunday Sermon Series says that on March 10, “We begin by going to the place where God dwells.” Easy to say, not so easy to do. After all, does any of us know where God lives? Heaven maybe, but who knows where that is and how would we ever get there? Not by any highway or bus or train routes I’ve seen, not through any airport I’ve found. Not by catching a ride on a Lunar landers or Mars rover or mission into the cosmos.

We can’t go there! We can’t just drop in for coffee. We are not God’s neighbors, God’s friends, God’s sisters and brothers. God the creator lives outside of creation, outside of time, inapproachable, undiscoverable, unknowable. We are creatures, part of God’s creation. We live not somewhere with God, but here, in creation, where God put us.

How do we go to the place where God dwells? We can’t. Instead we begin our Lenten journey by going to the place where God chooses to come to us. Where is that? Scripture gives us all sorts of answers to that one. Here are just a few.

John says (*John 1: 1, 3*) “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

Matthew (*Matthew 25: 31-46*) further fleshes that Word out, tells us God comes to us in the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, the prisoners whom God put’s in front of us.

Our Lenten journey will lead us, finally, to the foot of the cross where with the Centurion we look on Jesus, lifeless on that cross, and say (*Mark 15; 39*) “Truly this man was God’s Son.”

And in Revelation (*Revelation 21:3*) we read that in that new day, that new heaven and earth toward which we strain, “The home of God [will be] among mortals. God will dwell with them; they will be God’s peoples, and God will be with them. . . .”

I’m starting to get it now, are you? We don’t begin by going anywhere. We begin by opening our hearts and minds and hands and eyes to discover the places God comes to us saying, “Will you welcome me? Will you let me in?” Hmmm. Where, in whom, is God meeting me today?

Creator God, beyond our knowing or approaching, you come to us, wrapped in flesh in blood, today, every day. Open our hearts, our minds that we might invite you in. Amen.

Tuesday, March 12th

Jeff Langdon

We start the Lenten season with this story in Luke about Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness and temptations. These 40 days of Lent are meant to remind of us of those 40 days Jesus spent, as well as the 40 years that Israel spent wandering in the desert. Both instances include temptations, Jesus resisting the temptations not to trust God offered by Satan and the Israelites usually falling into the same temptation not to trust God. We too, during these 40 days, are reminded of our need to trust God.

Jesus's desert experience seems inconceivable if we believe that he was not both human and divine. I am sure that there are times that you knew you were filled with the Holy Spirit or tuned in the Spirit's workings and were able to resist those many temptations that try to draw you away from God and not trust in God's desires for you. You felt God's presence. But I am just as sure that there are those empty times, when dormant voices seem to materialize, when you don't trust God or you choose to abandon God. Where God seems distant. Where hope has vanished.... your own temptations surround you. It is during these times, those dark times in your life that you find yourself in a desert- your own desert- our own desert.

What remains is God's steadfast presence, drawing you near. It is the place where God dwells...close to use, even in your doubts and failures.... even in the places where you don't want God to see you. Remember that if Jesus was fully human too, then Jesus knows your pain. Jesus knows your doubts. Jesus knows your separation. And Jesus is there. And if Jesus is there, God is there.

Israel was led by God out of the wilderness. God is there for you too to be led out of your wilderness.

You cannot do it on your own. Jesus was able to resist the temptations offered by Satan because Jesus was divine. You are not. You are however, named and claimed by Jesus with the promise that nothing can separate you from God's love.

During these 40 days, rest in the arms of Jesus. Trust in God's love for you. Go ahead and wander in your life. God's got your back.

Dear God, help us in our wanderings, help us to trust in your presence and in your love for us. Help us to focus on your relationship with us as we walk these 40 days, leading to the celebration of your victory at Easter. Amen

Wednesday, March 13th

Juel Pierce

Once when we were at Wartburg Seminary, someone put a large banner up in the chapel which was most visible as you were leaving the chapel. It said, "THERE IS NOWHERE GOD IS NOT."

So where do we go to be with God, where God dwells? The sign in the chapel said we didn't have to stay in the chapel to be where God is. We don't have to go to church to be where God dwells. We don't have to go to Jerusalem, or Rome, or Chicago to the ELCA offices, or even to Kansas City to our Synod Office.

Psalm 139 says:

If I climb up to heaven, you are there;

if I make the grave my bed, you are there also.

*If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there your hand will lead me and your right hand hold me fast.*

Psalm 139:8-10

Sometimes we are a bit like the Pharisees and assume that God will not be in the “bad” parts of town, or the city, or wherever we don’t want to go. But it really is true that “there is nowhere God is not.”

How do we know? Because of Jesus, who came to live among us. In fact, Jesus ate with bad people. He spoke with those people who others didn’t want to associate with. He went to the cross to be with criminals and sinners, and people like us.

So, as you go on this Lenten journey this year, look around you, wherever you are. At home, at work, at worship, and maybe at places you don’t really want to be. Look for God, who surely dwells there.

O God, you are everywhere. Open our eyes this Lent to see you wherever we go, and wherever you are. AMEN.

Thursday, March 14th

Rev. Roger Lenander

¹³ “In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed; you guided them by your strength to your holy abode.

Exodus 15:13 (NRSV)

As Jesus was 40 days in the wilderness, no doubt he recalled the experience of the Israelites during their 40 years in the wilderness. For both it was a time of learning to trust in God to guide, provide, and protect them along the way.

We do not know the time that we will journey in this earthly life. We do know that we are the redeemed as we trust in Jesus, crucified and risen, to be our strength along the way. God has always dwelled in the midst of the life of God’s people and we live in the promise that Jesus dwells in our heart and mind to strengthen us in faith for the journey.

Jesus, help us to trust in your strength and steadfast love in our journey of faith. Let our walk be with the confidence that we can stand firm that wherever we are in life there God dwells, Amen.

Friday, March 15th

Misty Coyle

Have you ever imagined your life a river guiding you on a spiritual journey to God? When you first jump in, it’s so exciting, you feel God so present, you see Him in front of you. There are stepping stones in front of you making it easier for you to journey through the river towards Him.

Then one day the stepping stones in front of you in the river are gone and you have no place to go. You begin to panic and then you see this house on the river bank, safe and secure. The only path is backwards to this house. You know you don't want to go backwards, you want to move forward. You stand still on the stone you are standing on, take a deep breath, say a prayer and a stepping stone appears in front of you. You take another breath and another stone appears. With every breath, with every prayer a stone appears in front of you. You take another and you wait for the stone but it doesn't appear and then you look at the river bank and notice that God is delicately choosing the perfect stone to lay in front of you. He is tearing down the house stone by stone, tearing down your attachments as you breathe Him in, rest in Him in prayer, rely on Him, trust in Him.

Every time we allow these attachments to be torn down, dismantled, we grow closer to God, our spiritual journey continues and there are no boundaries as the river will continue to flow and God will continue to guide us, laying each stone in front of us. This was a reflection from a book I read: *"Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality"* by Margaret Silf.

Where does God dwell? Right beside us; in our hearts; in our actions towards others; in the midst of a crowd; or in heaven. God dwells where you need him. He is everywhere.

*Heavenly Father, be with us and help us let go as you tear down our comfortable house to place the stepping stones we need even when we don't think we need them. You are our all in all.
Amen!*