

There's a Crack in Everything --That's How the Light Gets In
Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Psalm 91; Romans 10:8-13; Luke 4:1-13
Sunday, March 10, 2019 — The First Sunday of Lent
Knox-Metropolitan United Church — Regina, SK — Treaty 4 Territory
Cameron Fraser

If you would enter/into the wilderness,/do not begin/without a blessing.

*Do not leave/without hearing/who you are:/Beloved,
named by the One/who has traveled this path/before you.*

*Do not go/without letting it echo/in your ears,
and if you find/it is hard/to let it into your heart,/do not despair.
That is what/this journey is for.*

*I cannot promise/this blessing will free you/from danger,/from fear,/from hunger/or thirst,
from the scorching/of sun/or the fall/of the night.*

But I can tell you/that on this path/there will be help.

I can tell you/that on this way/there will be rest.

*I can tell you/that you will know/the strange graces/that come to our aid
only on a road/such as this,
that fly to meet us/bearing comfort/and strength,
that come alongside us/for no other cause/than to lean themselves/
toward our ear
and with their/curious insistence/whisper our name:*

Beloved.

Beloved.

Beloved.¹

¹ Jan Richardson, "Beloved is Where we Begin" from *Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons* © Jan Richardson. janrichardson.com

Another blessing for the beginning of Lent by the brilliant Rev. Jan Richardson.

We also heard her words open this morning's service, and I'd love to re-visit a few lines:

So let us be marked/not for sorrow./And let us be marked/not for shame.

Let us be marked/not for false humility/or for thinking/we are less/than we are
but for claiming/what God can do

within the dust,/within the dirt,/within the stuff/of which the world is made/and the stars that blaze/in our bones/and the galaxies that spiral
inside the smudge/we bear.²

The weather App on my phone that morning, promised that it would be nicer on Wednesday than what actually transpired, particularly when the noonday sun decided to retreat behind the clouds.

So just before 12pm, along with clergy friends, Rev. Amanda Currie from First Presbyterian, Rev. Sarah Dymond from Trinity Lutheran, Father Mike Sinclair from St. Paul's Anglican, and Deacon Eric Gurash from Holy Rosary Cathedral, we set up a few A-frame Signs, some foldable card tables, and stood there with small dishes of Ashes, and for the next hour, made available to anyone who wanted it, a traditional 'imposition' of ashes on the forehead, a prayer, a chat, a cup of coffee.

The trick with ashes is that they are very dry so to make them usable (spreadable as we say in the biz), one either adds oil or a little bit of water - just a little bit of water because ash and water mixed together become caustic and irritate the skin...which I think would be a very effective special

² Jan Richardson, "A Blessing for Dust" © Jan Richardson. janrichardson.com

effect for a preacher to use, figure out the exact amount so that as they make a key point in their Ash Wednesday sermon, the foreheads of everyone in the room start to ominously burn.

For those keeping score at home, this past Wednesday on the Scarth Street Pedestrian Mall was cold enough that right before 1pm, when I went to give out the final Ashes of the day, my Ashes had frozen into 3 big clumps - I'll bring oil next year (having checked its freezing point of course).

The season, of Lent, which begins with Ash Wednesday is, I would suggest, one of those moments in the Christian Tradition that is an acquired taste, sort of like olives, scotch or really strong cheese. It's first invitation is to remember that all life is fragile and mortal, limited and fallible.

In 2018, Ash Wednesday happened to fall on February 14, and I was disappointed to not see more cards with something like...

Roses are Red/Violets are Blue/This bouquet is slowly dying/and you are too...

The Scripture reading for the First Sunday of Lent is always a version of the story of Jesus in the desert as we heard this morning.

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.

Chronologically, this reading comes right after the reading for the Sunday of the Baptism of Jesus, which always falls within the first week or so in the new year, wherein Jesus himself is baptized in the River Jordan and as he comes out of the water the Holy Spirit like a dove descends on him and then a voice from heaven declares (as we do when we mark the ritual of Baptism here):

You are my child, chosen and marked in love...

Or as Jan's blessing puts it...**BELOVED.**

Then in this desert narrative, Jesus fasts for 40 days and then at the end is famished, at which point he is visited by the devil, who presents 3 temptations — turn rocks into bread, be given authority over all the kingdoms of the world, and throw yourself from the top of the temple to make God’s angels save you.

There is a lot that we can say another time about the specifics of these ‘temptations’, but in very brief we might read these as material wealth and security — position of prestige — and power.

Three things upon which we so often define a human being, what they own, what they do, and what people think of them.

It is notable that these temptations are framed as a questions first... particularly notable when read in the light of the baptism story, in which Jesus is named beloved child of God.

If you are the Son of God...

The drama that is playing out in this passage is about **identity**.

A declaration is made about who Jesus is, and then the next moment, that is called into question.

Jesus wrestles with this, and if we were to follow the story after our reading left out, we would follow Jesus into another episode that we read several weeks ago, Jesus comes to the Synagogue on the Day of the Sabbath, and picks up the scroll to read:

*‘The Spirit of the God is upon me,
because God has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,*

to proclaim the year of God's favour.'

Having been faced with an invitation to define himself through property, power, prestige, Jesus, having rejected these, having subverted the narrative of empire embedded therein, he then claims identity through prophetic declaration and participation in the practice of Yahweh's justice.

The great philosopher Jean Vanier, founder of L'Arche, communities wherein people with severe intellectual disabilities live as core members alongside non-disabled 'assistants' who through community learn from core members what it means to be more human.

[W]e don't know what to do with our own pain, so what to do with the pain of others? We don't know what to do with our own weakness except hide it or pretend it doesn't exist. So how can we welcome fully the weakness of another if we haven't welcomed our own weakness?

[W]e will continue to despise people until we have recognized, loved, and accepted what is despicable in ourselves...what is it that is despicable in ourselves? There are some elements despicable in ourselves, which we don't want to look at, but which are part of our natures, that we are mortal.

We are very fragile in front of the future. Accidents and sicknesses is the reality. We are born in extreme weakness, and our life will end in extreme weakness. People don't want to hold on to that. They want to prove something. They want security. They want to have big bank accounts and all that sort of stuff — but then, also, hold lots of fears within us. We are a frightened people....the history of humanity is a history of people being born extremely fragile because sickness and death is part of our reality.³

I believe that we can read Jesus' wilderness wrestling, as a willingness to accept human frailty and vulnerability. Having been presented with a model

³ Jean Vanier "The Wisdom of Tenderness" with Krista Tippet *The On Being Project* <https://onbeing.org/programs/jean-vanier-the-wisdom-of-tenderness/#>

of human success and security, certainly an attractive one but ultimately destructive to self, others and earth, by accepting the ways in which that model is attractive, through that crack, light can enter.

Over the coming weeks, in the season of Lent, our reflections will surround that theme that there is a crack in everything, and that this is where the light comes in.

So doing, we'll wrestle with what is often some of the more confounding and often weaponized ideas within the Christian Tradition. Next week we'll begin with the word **sin** the role it plays in Biblical texts, how it has often been employed and wherein we might find a life-giving, light bringing invitation through what it points to about ourselves, relationships, and even God.

So welcome to Lent, 40 days (36 left for us this year) to embrace the cracks, seek the light, disrupt habits of thinking, expose and subvert problematic patterns of being.

The United Church Song of Faith offers this:

*In and with God,
we can direct our lives toward right relationship
with each other and with God.
We can discover our place as one strand in the web of life.
We can grow in wisdom and compassion.
We can recognize all people as kin.
We can accept our mortality and finitude, not as a curse,
but as a challenge to make our lives and choices matter.*

For perhaps it is in encountering that which dehumanizes, that we can discover our invitation to be more fully human.

Fragile. Mortal. Falible. Dust (even stardust). Beloved.

For in life, in death, in life beyond death. God is with us. We are not Alone.