

So ever year, on this first Sunday of Lent – we get this story of Jesus being driven into the desert – this year as told to us by St. Mark.

What we might not notice – is that this happens in each of the Synoptic Gospels – right before Jesus begins ----- his public ministry.

So – Jesus, right before he begins teaching and healing and forgiving and loving and challenging and motivating and calling others to follow after him --- AND for us, right at the beginning of Lent.

Why?

Because God is mean, fault-finding, or finger-pointing?

NO --- because God wants Jesus – as well as us – to be ready for the work, for the ministry, he has waiting for us. . . God wants us to be cleansed out and ready for all the good things he has in store for us. . . So Jesus' time in the desert, and our time in the desert – these 40 days of Lent --- are a time of preparation. It is a time of focusing on what is important – and what is not. So it is a time of cleansing, and clarifying, of control and of centering ---- all so that we can be ready for the joy-filled life God has planned for us.

Which brings us to today's quote: "If you are never able to live for anything bigger than your pocketbook, your stomach, or your career – then you will never be able to bless those around you." – Tim Keller.

Jesus was driven into the desert by the Spirit to prepare himself for the ministry God had ready for him --- which was to be a blessing, a Beatitude, an instrument of God's goodness – to all those he was going to meet over the next three years. And Jesus could not be that blessing – if he was worried about being rich, or where his next meal was coming from --- or whether he would be elected high priest for coming year. No, he put all of those earthly cares and concerns aside – to be the person God was calling him to be.

And we are called to be like Jesus. . . every year we are called back into the desert so that we can focus on being the people God is calling us to be. . . And we can't be the blessing we are called to be for others – if we are worried about our pocketbook, our stomachs, or our career ---- because if we get overly concerned about those things --- there is never going to be room in our hearts or our lives to be concerned about others. . . we will always be worried about MORE: more money, more food, a bigger and better career – therefore more status –and the ability to have more stuff.

Another quote I came across was that "Americans are the only ones who eat as if they don't know where their next meal is coming from – and are some of the few in the world who always do know."

We go into the desert – not because God is mean, fault-finding, or finger-pointing. We go into the desert to be honest with ourselves. To admit we aren't the people God wants us to be. We confess those things – we take ownership of the specifics that hold us back. And through discipline, and the grace of God – we make changes in our lives. So that after the desert, after Lent – we are more open to the joy that God wants us to have in life --- we are more open to the good things God has planned for us.