

Living Grace

CYCLE C 1ST SUNDAY
OF LENT

“BE STILL AND KNOW THE POWER OF GOD”

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE



STORY AND PICTURES BY MAURICE SENDAK

*In **Where the Wild Things Are**, a young boy named Max, after dressing in his wolf costume, wreaks such havoc through his household that he is sent to bed without his supper. Max's bedroom undergoes a mysterious transformation into a jungle environment, and he winds up sailing to an island inhabited by malicious beasts known as the "Wild Things". After successfully intimidating the creatures, Max is hailed as the King of the Wild Things and enjoys a playful romp with his subjects. However, Max starts to feel lonely and decides to return home, much to the Wild Things' dismay. Upon returning to his bedroom, he discovers a hot supper waiting for him.*



JEWISH SACRIFICE AND THE TEMPTATION OF CHRIST

Painting by Sandro Botticelli ~ 1478-81

Sistine Chapel ~ Vatican City, Italy

EXPLORING THE ART:

The above image is taken from a large fresco in the Sistine Chapel. The top left of the image depicts the fasting Jesus being tempted by the devil, who is disguised in clerical clothing and holding a rosary, to turn stones into bread. The message here could be to discern carefully even those who offer nourishment of body and soul, as the devil is a master of disguise. God is the true source of all provision. At the top center of the painting, the second temptation depicts Jesus on top of a present day church in Rome that would be recognizable to all, Santa Spirito in Sassia. Here the devil is again disguised as a monk and challenges Jesus' identity to become God. This painting is in the Pope's chapel to this day. It could be interpreted as the artist's reminder to the clergy to serve as channels of God's grace, and to avoid the temptation to think they are God. On the top right corner, Botticelli depicts the devil fully revealed, looking like a devil, tempting Jesus in a desire for wealth. This part of the painting emphasizes that the angels are always at our call to come to our aide, helping to reveal evil. This painting is a remarkable example of how artists can illuminate the scriptures to speak into our times. In Botticelli's time period there were many troubles among the Popes. It is an amazing example of the ability of the gospel stories to speak into current day realities with fresh insight.

PROVOCATIVE SYMBOLISM

Living Grace

READ-ALoud STORY



ABIDE IN ME

Vicki Shuck, Esperanza Arts

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love.

~ John 7:7-9

Read-aloud video link:

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

Written by & Illustrated by Maurice Sendak

Sunday Gospel

LUKE 4:1-13

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil.

He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry.

The devil said to him,

"If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread."

Jesus answered him,

"It is written, *One does not live on bread alone.*"

Then he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant.

The devil said to him,

"I shall give to you all this power and glory;

for it has been handed over to me,

and I may give it to whomever I wish.

All this will be yours, if you worship me."

Jesus said to him in reply,

"It is written

*You shall worship the Lord, your God,
and him alone shall you serve."*

Then he led him to Jerusalem,

made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him,

"If you are the Son of God,

throw yourself down from here, for it is written:

He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,

and:

*With their hands they will support you,
lest you dash your foot against a stone."*

Jesus said to him in reply,

"It also says,

You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test."

When the devil had finished every temptation,

he departed from him for a time.

Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

YIELDING TO THE SPIRIT WITHIN US STILLS OUR FEARS SO THAT GOD CAN USE US TO TAME THE WILDNESS AROUND US.

What is important in this gospel reading is recognizing it is the Spirit driving Jesus out into the desert to face the temptations. At first glance we might think that Jesus goes it alone out into the wilderness with very little resource, we realize this is not true when we consider what came right before this call out into the desert. Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan. We read, "As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove." It is important to realize that the Spirit has everything to do with this call and arduous journey in Jesus' life. The words used here are very dramatic. Heaven was "torn" open, and the Spirit "drove" him out into the desert. Mark seems to be telling us that the Spirit can also come into our lives in dramatic ways, and can begin to work immediately, taking us places that we would not choose to go on our own, inviting us to think and act in ways that we never thought we would have the strength to do so.

In our children's story, Max also takes a courageous journey of transformation. Jesus faced many "wild things" in the desert that had to cause him a great deal of fear, including Satan himself. Max and Jesus both learn to face the wild things with a weapon that the world would never think to offer - stillness. Max came to a place where the wild things were, and they roared their terrible roars and gnashed their terrible teeth and rolled their terrible eyes and showed their terrible claws, until Max said, "BE STILL!" And with that, Max tamed the wild things and they were frightened and called him the "most wild thing of all". They even made him King of the Wild Things. Jesus went into the desert alone and in silence to face all of his human fears and temptations. In the stillness he discovered "the way" of relying completely on the strength and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' journey is one of transformation in which he moves from being anointed and called through baptism, to becoming empowered by the Spirit. As soon as Jesus leaves the desert, John is arrested, and the mission of redeeming God's people becomes Jesus' to fulfill. His very first words in the beginning of his public ministry are "The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel."

God calls us into the desert this Lenten season by first reminding us that the Spirit of God is within us, and wants to work powerfully in our lives and in the world through us. After an encounter with God, everything else might still be the same in our families and with our friends, but inside we have changed - we have conquered our fears, our complacencies, our boredom. We now have a call and a purpose to begin to build the Kingdom of God right where we are. We have all that we need within us, by connecting with the Spirit of God. We can access the strength and power of the Spirit simply by remembering, to "Be Still".

The church gives us Lent to help us remember that our relationship with God is an "inside job". We all have what we need within, to accomplish the call of God in our lives. Like Jesus, we share in this call to grow the Kingdom of God through our baptism. We can access our own strength and power by remembering to "Be Still" in prayer and silence. Like Jesus, we will be tested, so that we can grow strong. And like Jesus, we will be given all that we need. If it is anything like the way it went for Max and Jesus, change is here, and we will see it happen, on earth just as it is in heaven!

Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

YOUR STORY: Do you sometimes need to take a "time out"? What happens when you do? Are you changed by it? Do you ever have wild dreams? How do they make you feel? Do they sometimes feel real?

THE CHILDREN'S STORY: What did Max confront in his dream? How did he confront his fears? Where did his help come from? Why did Max confront the Wild Things? How did his "time out" change him?

THE GOSPEL STORY: How did Jesus' "time out" prepare him for how his life had changed? What kind of preparation did Jesus need, and how did he learn the lessons? How did Jesus confront his fears? Where did his help come from? How did Jesus' and Max's "time out", and all they learned from it, change them? For what purpose did Max and Jesus confront the wild things?

How are we called as Christians today to confront the "wild things" in our lives and in our world? How does the church offer us Lent as a "time out", to be still and discover what lies within us? How will that help us in our God given purpose?

Biblical Background

LUKE 4:1-13

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING: In this Gospel account, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the desert near Jericho, in close proximity to Jerusalem. Jericho is approximately 1000 feet BELOW sea level, while Jerusalem is 2500 feet ABOVE sea level, so this desert is part of the great African rift valley that slices through the land of Israel from north to south. The desert lands that surround Jericho are harsh, barren, hot, and forbidding. The only way that Jesus would survive is through his reliance on God his father to provide for all of his needs. The desert is a lonely place and there was perceived a haunt of demons, especially those that had been “cast out” of a host by a religious healer. Those demons have to go somewhere, and in the mind of the ancients, the desert regions were their preferred location. One would fully expect to meet a demon or two in the desert, and Jesus is not disappointed.

TERMS: Drove In Luke’s account, the Spirit “drove”, or compelled, Jesus to go into the desert. This is not something that one would normally do, as the desert is filled with wild beasts and considered dangerous.

CULTURAL INSIGHT: The verse before the Gospel is during Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan river, and opens with a voice from heaven heard proclaiming, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased”. This was a public proclamation of honor that would not go unchallenged. In the time of Jesus, every public claim to honor had to be tested in order to be proven true. Therefore, it makes perfect sense that Jesus was led into the desert, where he would be tested (tempted) by the Devil. The Devil is the enemy of God and God’s plan of salvation for all men and women. He had to challenge the claim of honor made about Jesus by the Father. The Devil tried to seduce the Son to sin, and in the process, fall into the same state of alienation and separation from God as the Devil. Jesus would be honored by his disciples for the fearless way that he entered into this time of challenge.

INSIGHT INTO MEANING: Note that Jesus was tempted for the entire period of 40 days. In the Biblical world 40 is an important number. Moses was on the mountain with God for 40 days. The Israelites wandered in the deserts for 40 years. Jesus was tempted for 40 days and outwits the Devil in the end. Jesus shares with his disciples only three specific temptations, rather than enumerate all the times the Devil tried to seduce him to sin. The Devil tries to tempt Jesus to change his mind, to throw away his life, and finally, to accept a bribe to forgo his role as the Messiah. These three “types” of temptations correspond to the daily prayer of every Jewish person. Jewish people pray each day that they will be able to love the Lord their God with their whole heart (in Biblical times, the mind/heart space is combined with the whole soul, meaning life) and with all their strength (which roughly translates to what the mind and body combine to produce, meaning wealth). The Devil tempted Jesus in each of these areas and lost in the exchange each time.

Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME
AND IN THE WORLD



till Max said "BE STILL!"
and tamed them with the magic trick

QUESTION OF THE WEEK: What are some of your fears? Talk about them with each other as a family. How can you replace your fears with faith? Pick one idea and work on it throughout Lent.

GOSPEL CHARACTER QUALITIES: INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
COURAGE

FAMILY ACTIVITIES: 1) Brainstorm what kind of things we fear. Who are the monsters and scary things in our lives? Get a large piece of poster paper, trace your body on it, and then create a monster, or a personification of something that you would be scared of in the desert. This might be an animal, a being, or an experience such as failure, being left out, etc. The point is to help us name our fears, and to learn that we can conquer our fears by slowing down and remembering that we have the Holy Spirit within us to call upon, to calm our fears, and to fight our fears with faith. Create a meditation prayer to encourage stillness and to practice calling upon the Holy Spirit and the angels to conquer our fears.

2) How can we, as individuals and as families, find time for stillness and prayer during Lent? Research the places in your state and diocese where people live and pray in silence. Talk about what it is like or show pictures of these places. How can you find silence and the "desert experience" around you in your suburban or urban setting? How can you create a place of prayer and quiet in your own home?