

First Sunday of Lent

Gen 9:8-15; 1Pt 3:18-22; Mk 1:12-15

A young dad was caught in a blizzard up north.
His truck left the road, and the wheels were just spinning – there was no way he could get out.

It was getting dark and it seemed pointless to walk through the snow to get help – so he decided to wait for the light of daybreak before taking any action.

When he woke up in the morning his truck was completely frozen over and covered in sleet and snow.

It was actually 4 days later he was discovered.
When he was rescued – he was asked what he did during those long four days.

He replied – with total seriousness – “I did an awful lot of thinking and praying.”

Later that evening after being re-united with his family – his little boy asked him:
Did God put you in TIME OUT”?

Brothers and sisters,

For many parents and their children – “time out” represents a season of PUNISHMENT for childhood “misdeeds”.

“Time out” in this context sends the child to his/her room – or to some other place away from the FUN ----there banished into boredom – until “They learn their lesson.”

Time out is a time for SOUL SEARCHING for the child – or so the parents hope.

It is a strategy that ATTEMPTS to mold a child’s BEHAVIOR by WITHHOLDING something GOOD – RATHER than by afflicting the child with something painful.

So – if I described the season of LENT as “40 days of time out” would you assume that it must be a time of punishment for misdeeds?

Is this a time for us to dread – to watch the calendar as we COUNT DOWN these awful 40 days – like a child “watching a clock” – waiting for the end of his “sentenced time away” from the playground?

Is Lent – with its themes of
sacrifice
self denial
soul-searching
and repentance
just an effort by stuffy Christians to make those who enjoy pleasure to feel guilty?

NO – Our 40 days of TIME OUT are NOT a season of punishment.

To CORRECTLY understand our use of “time out” think instead of the “time out” from the context of sports.

In sports – for example BASKETBALL & FOOTBALL – time outs are STRATEGIC MOMENTS
to plan
to change direction
or to control momentum.

Time outs are CRUCIAL to a coach’s effort to win the game.

Time outs are NOT penalties afflicted on the team by the referee.

Rather time outs are LIMITED & cherished ASSETS – and they are RESERVED for use by the coach at only the most important moments of the contest.

Time outs allow the team
to focus their thoughts
to regain their stamina,
to align their wills for the DECIDING point of the contest.

This is the correct understanding of LENT for the Church.

Lent is a season of time out from the hectic rush of the clock

a time to “huddle up” for counsel & reflection

a time to focus again on what really matters

So – time out.

With this sports metaphor in mind – listen again to the gospel lesson for today: *“The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert – and he remained in the desert for 40 days – tempted by Satan – among the wild animals – but the angels ministered to him.”*

Did you hear that?

It was the SPIRIT that drove Jesus into His time out.

Jesus did not wander off and get LOST out there.

It was His COACH – THE SPIRIT – who called the time out by sending him there. And the Spirit did not call the time out because Jesus was losing the game OR because he had done something wrong to warrant being pulled out of the lineup.

No – in fact – Jesus has just emerged from his baptism just prior to this – a moment of divine affirmation from His heavenly father.

This is my Son – my beloved – my favor rests on him.

Based on this “time out” experience in the desert – Jesus would be prepared for the life of obedience he would give to God the Father.

In the same way -- - our EXPERIENCE of LENT is INTENDED to HIGHLIGHT & INCREASE our ongoing ROLE on “God’s Team”- to equip us better for the CRUCIAL moment when the BALL will be placed in our hands.

Time out.

May this season of Lent be just such a time for each of us;
a time to huddle close to God

to sense God’s confidence in us

to commit ourselves to serve God with our whole heart – soul – mind – and strength.

During this time out we will be tempted by many distractions – efforts by the devil – to keep this crucial time from accomplishing these great purposes.

But that is why we will huddle up here at church each week – to listen to God’s instruction in the Bible readings – to receive Jesus in Holy Communion – to help us keep our minds and hearts in the game.

40 days.

It's a long time out.

But the number 40 is intended to remind us of previous seasons of God's protection & provision for His people when they faced other times of trial ---
the 40 days Noah and his family were sustained on the ark during the flood
the 40 years in the desert when Israel was wandering between Egypt and the Promised Land
the 40 days Moses spent on Mt Sinai receiving the ten commandments.

40 days is

- long enough for good habits to stick
- long enough to reflect on our direction in life and make necessary changes
- long enough to regain our momentum & strength for the moment when the whistle blows and the game resumes at its crucial – cross-shaped moment for us.

But for now – in preparation for that moment – God – our coach has called this “time out”.

So huddle up.

It's lent.

40 days of time out.

Let's use it wisely!