

When I was in seminary, I had the joy of being part of the music team for a 5pm eucharist for the Sewanee college students. At the beginning of the week, the three of us on the music team would gather, look over the readings, and pick songs that matched the readings, if at all possible. I was so excited one week because one of the lines in the gospel reading was “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’” I happened to know that there was a beloved hymn in our hymnal that sounded great on guitar that also had an extra third verse that went “We shall not live by bread alone, but by every word, that proceeds from the mouth of God, hhhmmm hhhmmm hhhmmm hmm hm hhhhhh hhhhhh...”

That’s right, six years ago, on the first Sunday of Lent, I led a congregation in Seek Ye First. You know, the hymn where the *entire chorus* is just one word, repeated over and over. That word starts with “A” and ends with “lleluia.” Oh and did I mention that the preacher that night was the *Dean of the Seminary*? Yea, that was pretty embarrassing.

So, we will NOT be singing that hymn today. But I am still very excited to be reflecting on Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness here on this first Sunday in Lent.

This past Wednesday was Ash Wednesday when we, along with Christians all over the world, began the season of Lent remembering our mortality and need for penitence. At that service, we were invited “in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent by self-examination and repentance, by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and

meditating on God's holy Word.” We also received ashes on our foreheads in the sign of the cross, and heard the words, “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” A sober reminder of our weakness and God’s grace.

Our observance of Lent is based, in part, on the forty days that Jesus spent in the wilderness before beginning his public ministry. These forty days, as we heard in the gospel reading, were prompted by the Spirit, came after Jesus’ baptism, and were a time for Jesus to do some self-examination, prayer, and fasting of his own while meditating and relying on God's holy Word. Thus, Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness has significance for us in two ways. It models for us both how to live in these 40 days of Lent AND how the entire journey of faith works--from beginning to end.

It is highly significant that Jesus’ journey in the wilderness takes place directly after his baptism. It was at his baptism that the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus like a dove and a voice came from heaven saying, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” Jesus is able to reject temptations he experiences in the wilderness because he has been anointed by the Holy Spirit in the waters of baptism and because he relies on God and God’s Word to support him in his time of trial. You know who else has been anointed by the Holy Spirit in the waters of baptism and can rely on God and God’s Word in time of need? All of us!

Baptism is the beginning of the Christian journey. It is the time when the community gathers to pray for and bear witness to a person’s renunciation of evil and their acceptance of Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. This is

the first step on the journey of faith. By virtue of our baptism, we are also able to claim that we are God's children, God's beloved, in whom God is well pleased. And so our first steps in the Christian faith are supported by God who loves us whoever we are, just as we are.

*And* from there, God calls us to know and trust God more and more. To grow in faith as we grow in age. To rely on God alone and not ourselves. To have our relationship with God be the most important thing in our lives. That's how Jesus withstood these temptations. He didn't rely on bread alone but by knowing God's Word; he worshipped God and served only him. He did not put God to the test by showing off his privilege. And he did it all in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit thanks to his baptism.

All of this illustrates the core aspects of what faith in God looks like--knowing, worshipping, serving, and being in relationship with God. And those are the four things that we try to do together at church. Through Christian Education, Worship, Outreach, and Fellowship, we grow in our faith, one step at a time.

But *how* do we grow in our faith? *How* do we come to know and rely on God more and more? *How* do we live out our baptismal covenant? Well, by God's grace, mediated through Word and Sacrament, *and* through spiritual practices that help us to experience God's grace in practical ways. That's great, but what does that really mean? Well, it means that we need to trust that God's Spirit is working in all of us all on its own *and* it means that we

can participate in that work through specific actions. And THAT is why you were handed a booklet on your way in today.

As you can read in the introduction, this booklet is the fruit of the St. Paul's RenewalWorks effort. Remember taking that spiritual inventory in the fall? Well, this is what that team and your vestry and clergy are bringing back to you, the first fruits of this spiritual harvest. In this booklet are 16 different pathways to spiritual growth. These pathways have been carefully designed so that the steps match the stages and so that together they cover the four aspects of spiritual life in the church. For each of the four stages on the spiritual continuum--Exploring, Growing, Deepening, Centered--there are four different sets of steps for Christian Education, Worship, Outreach, and Fellowship. What we are all invited to do is to pick a pathway, take a step, and see what happens.

Let's check out a few... say you're growing in your faith and you'd like to learn more about Worship. Go to the Growing page, find the Worship section, and then choose one of these steps to try out. (Deepening, Outreach.)

Of course, there is more going on at St. Paul's than we could possibly fit in this booklet and that's why every page has the recommendation to come talk with the clergy. We can help guide you in your journey as well as offer prayer and support along the way. It's exactly what we're here for and we love this stuff.

And so does God. God delights when we take responsibility for our spiritual lives, when we prioritize and invest in our faith. Because this life is

