

Speaker 1 ([00:01](#)):

You know what? I say that the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, and this morning we began a long journey through the sacred season of lent. That 40 day period that leads up to Easter. The 40 days of course, as you know, symbolizes the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness. We'll hear that story in just a moment. 40 is an important number in the Bible. You know, you've probably heard me say that if there's ever a mention of a number that that's probably on purpose, that there's a reason and 40 is an important number in the Christian faith besides the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness. If you remember back at rain for 40 days and 40 nights on Noah and his family and the arc, it was also the 40 years that the Israelites spent wandering in the wilderness before leaving, before being led across the red sea. And I suppose you could say that since this is a Lenten sermon and 40 is an important number, this is going to be a 40 minute sermon this morning.

Speaker 1 ([01:13](#)):

That's a joke. Just so you know. I want you guys to know. I saw you getting squirmy there for a minute. In ancient times, the ancient church lent was a time for new converts to be instructed for baptism, for, for believers who were stuck on sin to focus on repentance. Eventually all Christians came to see Lent as a season is a time to be aware, reminded of their need for reconciliation of prayer spiritually for that great celebration that is Easter and today we begin that journey. We'll start by looking at the beginning of Jesus's ministry, his baptism, and as I said, the 40 days that he spent fasting in the wilderness during which he was tempted and tested. We were reading this morning from Mark's version of the Bible. Mark, as you may know, is the earliest of the gospels. It was the first one that was written. It's also the shortest and anytime you read Mark, you may notice that the story tends to move quickly.

Speaker 1 ([02:15](#)):

Mark seems to be in a rush. There's not a lot of detail. There's not a lot of dancing around. He gets straight to the point. In fact, one of the most common words that Mark uses is immediately and immediately Jesus left and immediately this happened and immediately he went over here. It's as if Mark is in a hurry. He doesn't have time for distractions and some of us live the same way. There was a hurriedness to our life. Let's just get on with the facts. Let's get quick to the point, no time for a lot of fluff, but yet Mark has the ability to say a lot in just a few words. You may remember that in Mark's gospel there is no birth story. Here we are and only the ninth verse in already we're talking about his baptism. And by doing this it takes the emphasis off of the birth of Jesus in places that squarely on the importance and the significance of his baptism. That is where Mark begins his story and where we begin our journey through the season of lent.

Speaker 2 ([03:32](#)):

The reading this morning comes from Mark chapter one verses nine through 14 here it begins to rain. And those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven. You and my son, the beloved was you. I am well pleased. And the spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness 40 days tempted by Satan, and he was with the wild bees and the angels waited on him. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God. Aaron's reading the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Speaker 1 ([04:31](#)):

That was awesome, Abby. Thank you. So has this ever happened to you? It happens to me all the time, but I misplaced my cell phone and of course I keep it on silent all the time. It just buzzes in my pocket so that I know that I'm giving a call or a text. But in this moment it is a bit of a nuisance because I don't know where my phone is and so I have someone call me, but because it's on silent I have to listen for that buzz and I tell everybody in the room be quiet for just a minute and it's a quieting down, but also in a heightening of an awareness is everybody listens. Trying to hear that buzz.

Speaker 1 ([05:20](#)):

That's what we're trying to do as a congregation during this season of lent to try and turn down the distractions, turn away from the Buisness of our lives, try to strip away some of the noise and to focus our attention on listening in a deeper way. Our lives can get so overcrowded with so many messages telling us, telling us how to determine our values, how to, how to live our lives, and this series is all about looking within, defining the answers, waiting simply for God's quiet calling to help us find our purpose. Our hope is that we find that still small voice that we can finally hear that still small voice and in the process discover our own voice as well. Someone once said that the faith journey is less about making a big leap of faith than it is about putting one faithless foot in front of the other and then doing it again and again.

Speaker 1 ([06:21](#)):

And what happens is if you walk this way, sometimes you are transformed by grace. Okay, no place. Could that observation be more true that when it comes to the focus of this series on the importance of prayer, of, of listening for God, because with prayer we are constantly reminded that God chooses relationship over perfection, that God chooses relationship over perfection, and this is both. As you can imagine, both a blessing and a challenge. The blessing is is that we don't have to be saints in order to have an authentic conversation with God. Now, the challenge in that of course is that we don't have to be saints in order to have an authentic conversation with God. But really aside from rattling off a few one way requests now and then most of us would just assume leave the conversation or the relationship with God with others like the saints or the professional Christians, these, these clergy folks that isn't that why we have clergy and that why we have saints to to take care of all that for us.

Speaker 1 ([07:42](#)):

I will say this, that wherever you are on your spiritual journey, the impact of this series is going to depend a whole lot more on you than it will on me. And that's because the focus of the series is less about learning about God and much more about experiencing God firsthand for yourself and in ways that neither you or I can predict. And so a lot of it will depend on your willingness to allow God to connect with you in the first place. And I can almost promise you that you will struggle with the mere notion of being willing to communicate.

Speaker 1 ([08:27](#)):

This may or may not surprise you, but personally, the realization that God can and will engage with us has been for me, one of my biggest burdens. I know that may sound a little bit crazy, but the biggest challenge I face in my spiritual life and my relationship with God by far is just being willing, being in a relationship with God. I kid you not. Louis Smeets was a pastor, a preacher. He was a writer, and to paraphrase something that he said one time, if you've ever been frustrated, if you've ever been confused, if you've ever been stuck, if you've ever struggled, if you've ever had doubts, you're my kind of person.

Speaker 1 ([09:12](#)):

So it is with all of us. I think we all struggle. We all long to have that deeper sense of connection that that, that deeper relationship with God. In fact, the most common theme that I hear people coming into my office with spiritual issues is that people are frustrated with not being able to grow spiritually. They find it difficult to put faith into practice, to fully integrate their faith into their daily living. They feel like they've got their Sunday selves and then the rest of themselves the rest of the week. Most of us have a hard time living the life that wants to live in us, to be the person that God created us to be. And so this morning I simply want to invite you to ask yourself, what would it look like for you if in the next 40 days if you trusted, if you just trusted it.

Speaker 1 ([10:11](#)):

God wants nothing more than to connect with you. The God longs to be in a relationship with you to trust that God is speaking, that God is calling to us. That if we just slowed down a little bit, if we just quieted the noise and the distractions, if we could, if we could just sit, be silent, we might be able to hear the still small voice. God speaking to us a few weeks ago I mentioned in the sermon how much Parker Palmer's book *Let Your Life Speak* has impacted me and how it's shaped my life and my ministry. And it fits well. In fact with this series in fact. So we are, uh, there are a couple of different groups that are reading this, uh, discussion groups and looking at this book and if you would like to be a part of that, we'll gather it tomorrow night at six o'clock on Monday evenings.

Speaker 1 ([11:10](#)):

I think I said six at six 30. I think there's also a group that meets during the Sunday school hour and if you'd like to be a part of either of those groups, it's not too late to join in. But he explains in this book where the title comes from, *Let Your Life Speak*. He says it's an old Quaker phrase. And when he first came across the Quakers, when he was in his thirties, Palmer says that he was very much drawn to that image of letting your life speak. He says that at first he thought that it meant that you were to let your life live up to the highest principles and ideals, those ideals of the Quaker tradition, things like equality and nonviolence and community and peace too. To let demanding standards guide you the way in which you lived your life, but as he began to understand over years and with some help, that the real meaning of that message of letting your life speak was to listen to your life, to let your life speak to you.

Speaker 1 ([12:13](#)):

You had to to let listen to your life, to find out how your own heart and soul are yearning, what they're yearning for in terms of your identity, your integrity, to continually ask yourself if the life that you are living is the life that wants to live in you. Is your life really your own or do you ever find yourself wanting to live into somebody else's vision of what your life should be? B of how you should act, of how you should live? He says in the first chapter, before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen to what it intends to do for you before you tell your life what truths and values you have decided to live up to let your life tell you what truths you embody, what values you represent. Joseph Campbell said something very similar. He said, the spiritual imperative to be ourselves is so strong that the soul would rather fail at its own life than to succeed at someone else's trying to live someone else's life. Well inevitably variably fail and it may even do so with great damage and I wonder if part of the reason that many of us are stuck, that many of us are confused, that many of us are frustrated is because we're trying to live someone else's life. We're trying to be someone else.

Speaker 1 ([13:46](#)):

I told you last week about Bob Goff, one of my new favorite authors, and another one of his books, not the one that I quoted last week. He tells about the time he took his kids to Madame Tussaud's wax museum. They were in Washington, D C he was speaking at a conference and they had the afternoon free. And so we decided let's go to the wax museum. And he was dressed in a suit cause he was going to be speaking at the conference later that afternoon. And as they're walking through the wax figures there was, they were in Washington, D C a row of several different senators and he thought it would be funny. And so he just kind of jumped in between the third and the fourth Senator. And he just kind of struck a pose. And his children laughed and they were embarrassed as children are often by their parents. And they said, you know, dad, act your age. And he said, I am. And now what he wasn't counting on was that about the time that he struck that pose and his children started to laugh. Two little old ladies came walking around the corner and they stopped right in front of him and they commented to each other. He looks so real. In fact, one of them reached up and tugged on his beard and he said in that moment I couldn't move. She'd have a heart attack and own my house, so we just sat posing till they left.

Speaker 1 ([15:23](#)):

You were late. Her ass later ask, reflect on that life about all the times in his life that he was a poser. You said, are you a poser? Are you a poser? Are you faking it in some way, shape or form? Are there ways in places in your life when you're just posing so that other people may think that you are better than you actually are? You see, I think the biggest temptation that any of us will face, the biggest test is the temptation to be someone you're not in order to impress someone else. Do you ever find yourself in the situation? Maybe you're at work, maybe you're with your children and you sort of have one of those outer body experiences where you can hear what you're saying and you can almost like you're seeing it from outside of your body. You can just sort of find yourself in that situation, standing above it and just think, who is that person? I don't even recognize that person.

Speaker 1 ([16:31](#)):

And I think in those moments that God speaks into that and just says, will you just be you? We could just be you. One of my favorite movies is the movie hook where the adaptation of Peter pan and Peter pan grows up to be this, this miserable, uptight lawyer. And there's this great scene where he encounters the lost boys once again, and one of them, one of the lost boys, it's right up close and recognizes and sees him in his eyes and just grabs him by the side of the face and says, there you are, Peter. There you are.

Speaker 1 ([17:14](#)):

I think there are times when God grabs us by the face and says, who are you? God says, I, I know who you are, but I can't see you right now because you're posing. You're trying to be someone you're not. But I see you. And Ephesians four Paul is writing to his friends and he says to them, live into the life worthy of the calling you've received. Don't try to live someone else's calling. Live a life worthy of the calling you've received. You see church, what I'm posing, I'm not living into my calling. What's your calling? We all have one. Who is God calling you to be?

Speaker 1 ([18:08](#)):

There's a little Hasidic tale that speaks to not only the tendency to be something you're not, but also the importance of being yourself. It's the story where this disciple comes to the rabbi and asked, what must I do to become more like Moses? And the rabbi says to this disciple, you know, in the coming age when you die, you will not be asked. Why were you not more like Moses? You will be asked, why will you not

more like yourself in the text that we heard just a moment ago, Jesus is tempted by Satan and Satan tries to tempt him into being someone he's not. And in many ways that was the test, right? The devil is asking, are you going to be the one that God created you to be the one that God sent you to be? Or are you going to be something else?

Speaker 3 ([19:03](#)):

It's [inaudible]

Speaker 1 ([19:04](#)):

try and impress me. Well, I'm not sure what you think of the devil. If you believe in the devil, if you believe in the personification of evil or not. Someone asked me once if I believed in the devil, I told him no. I believe in God. Uh, that's another sermon for another time. But I wonder if sometimes the devil is something that, that humans have created in order to let ourselves off the hook. You know what we say, right? Wasn't me not my fault. The devil made me do it. The word devil comes from the Greek word, the Abalos comprised of two different words, DHEA, which means around or through and BOLO, which means to throw. It's where the word ball comes from. So the literal translation of Satan's name, the devil is one who throws things around. One who throws things around. One who stirs things up, gets people confused. You see the best description of the work of the devil is to get us muddled,

Speaker 3 ([20:16](#)):

confused, stuck.

Speaker 1 ([20:21](#)):

But the work of lent you see church, the work of is to find that clarity to become clear about who we are, to begin living, to dare to begin living an authentic life, to move off that place of being stuck and confused and live into the calling that God has placed on our lives. Want to close with this? There's a tribe in East Africa in which the birth date of a child is not counted from the day of its physical birth or even the date of the conception of that child as it is in some other village cultures. But for this particular tribe, the birthdate that is celebrated comes from the first time that the child is thought of in the mother's mind when the thought of that child is first conceived in the mother's mind. Once she becomes aware of her intention to conceive a child with a particular father, that mother to be then goes off into silence and sits underneath the tree alone and she sits there until she can hear the song of that child. Don't you love that she sits there until she can hear the song, that child that she hopes to conceive. And once she's heard that song, she goes back to her village and she teaches that song to the father so that they can sing it as they make love as they invite that child into be.

Speaker 1 ([21:50](#)):

And after that child is conceived, she sings it to the baby in her room over the next nine months. And she teaches that song to the, to the, to the old women, to the midwives of a village. So that throughout her labor and throughout this miraculous moment of the birth itself, that child is greeted into this world with its own song. And after the birth, all of the villagers learn the song of their newest member and they sing it to that child throughout the different times of his life. And times when it falls down. And gets hurt the moment when it finds itself crying. The village surrounds it with the sound of its own song, remind that child of who they are. It's sung at times of rituals and initiations all along that child's life. The song even becomes a part of the marriage ceremony when the child has grown and then, and then at the end of its life, this child with all of his or her grandchildren and great grandchildren, all of his loved

ones surround them on their death bed and they sing that song for the last time. See shirts. The work of lent is to listen. That we might be able to hear the song of our own heart beating to the rhythm of a still small voice, voice of a divine than wants nothing more than to be connected with us. That worries a whole lot more about relationship than us being perfect, but just longs to connect with us and we listen and we listen that we might hear that voice along the way, find our own.