

M A R K 1 : 9 - 1 3

NIV: At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was living with the wild animals, and angels attended to him.

S C R I P T U R A L  
B A C K G R O U N D

The Gospel of Mark begins with water. Unlike the other gospels, there is no mention of the birth of Jesus. No shepherds or wise men like in Luke and Matthew's gospels, respectively. It is also unlike John, as the book of John begins with an emphasis on how, through Jesus, God is making a new beginning for all creation.

Mark begins with John the Baptist in the wilderness, baptizing people and making way for the one who is to come. Jesus comes down to meet him at the water and asks to be baptized. John the Baptist baptizes Jesus in the river and Jesus emerges.

Suddenly the heavens tear apart and the voice of God the Father says, "You are my Son, my Beloved. In you, I am well pleased."

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus' ministry begins in the waters of baptism and immediately he is taken out to the wilderness - a dry, sandy, desolate place stretching from Jerusalem to the City of Jericho. Tradition has identified the mountain top where Jesus spent his 40 days in the wilderness.

This mountain top is called Mount Quarantania, from the Latin word "quarantena," which means "forty." Notably, the word "quarantine" is also derived from the same Latin Word. In the Middle Ages, ships that traveled from plague-infested ports were required to sit at anchor for forty days before anyone was allowed to disembark - that 40 day period of isolation led to our modern idea of quarantining. Similarly, the Spanish word for Lent is "Cuaresma".



# PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS TO MINISTRY

There is a powerful notion with Jesus beginning his ministry with a period of isolation, a Spiritual quarantine. Having lived through years of pandemic, we have become more aware of the way in which quarantining is an act of care and compassion. We quarantine to protect people we love - the most vulnerable in our communities.

Jesus could have stayed in a place of abundant water. He had the ability to turn stones into bread. He could have stayed at home with his beloved family.

Instead he CHOSE to let go of all these things for a season. He CHOSE to experience thirst, that he might have compassion for the thirsty. He CHOSE to experience hunger, that he might have compassion for the hungry. He CHOSE isolation, that he might have compassion for the lonely.

This is why we emulate Jesus' journey in the wilderness by observing Lent. This time of intentionally reflecting on God's love for us, demonstrated on the cross, ought to spur us to deepen our faith. Christ has called us to love God above all else and love others as ourselves (Matthew

22:37-39), may we all dwell on this during Lent.

This year for our 40 days - our Spiritual period of Quarantine - let us deepen our compassion. In worship, might we pay special attention to stories of thirst and longing for water? In our daily life, might we lend our attention to our use of water? In our interactions, might we think how others access water?

## QUESTIONS TO PONDER

As we begin our season of Lent - our 40 days - many of us consider something to abstain from or alter in our daily life. One possible alteration we could make could be to replace all soft drink consumption, with water. We, like Jesus, need to be intentional in order to obtain more compassion for the needs of others. This year, let us consider these questions in our journey:

- How can I be intentional this Lenten Season, to deepen my faith?
- How can I broaden my compassion for those who are lacking?
- In my daily life, where do I use water?
- How does water, this life-giving substance, give me life each day?
- How can I value water more?