

Today is the 3rd Sunday in Lent. In these forty days of Lent, we, the followers of Jesus Christ at Kona United Methodist Church, imagine ourselves being with Jesus in the wilderness. So far, we have had the wilderness time in this season of Lent as a time of learning and a time of challenge. Today, we will have wilderness time as a time of dependence.

In an age of self-sufficiency and one-upmanship, it may seem counterproductive to talk about dependence. For many, dependence is a sign of undignified weakness. However, nature itself teaches us that dependence is key to our existence. We enter into this world in a state of total dependence. And those who boast of achieving great feats of human strength become fully dependent on others as they reach old age.

For the Christian, dependence is everything. At the heart of sin is our pride-filled independence from God, and our salvation is achieved on the bedrock of total dependence on the finished work of Christ's death and resurrection. We depend on the Holy Spirit for our sanctification and Christian service.

Total dependence is central to Jesus' teaching on entering the kingdom of God. Jesus points to the necessity of having child-like dependence (Matthew 8:3) and gives a strong warning to the rich who depended on their material possessions, making it harder for them to enter God's kingdom (Matthew 19:24).

Wilderness time is a time of complete dependence on God as we acknowledge our helplessness in the wilderness. This is such an important part of the wilderness experience. When the Israelites were in the Sinai wilderness, God gave them what they needed, and God gave them only what they needed for the day. God could have provided at once the manna and everything else the Israelites needed for their wanderings in the wilderness. But God didn't do that. God gave them only enough for the day. This lesson taught the Israelites not just dependence but habitual dependence on God. Each new day brought them a new reminder of their utter dependence on God.

A Jewish boy, Jesus, who was brought up in this tradition of habitual dependence on God, was tested His belief and values in the wilderness before beginning His

public ministry. Jesus was without any food in the wilderness for 40 days to prepare Himself for the mission that God the Father had sent Him to accomplish.

In the wilderness, Jesus increased His confidence in God to assure His dependence on God. When He was tempted and tested, He quoted the Words of God and claimed them to be His by saying, "...it is written..." (Matthew 4:1-11). In other words, Jesus chose to depend on what God said, not what others said. Jesus was confident in who God was and what God said. For knowing who God is more fully, Jesus spent time with God in the wilderness.

In times of trial or testing, it is crucial to know how competent our God is for us to rely on God. Our ability to depend on God is from knowing how competent our God is. To know God, we need to spend time with God. Theoretically, we know of this. However, many of us in the wilderness of trial and temptation are in doubt. We are struggling in the wilderness. We don't know how God will help us. We don't see what God can do. We are anxious, depressed, distressed, or feeling other difficult emotions. How can we trust God and know that He will help us?

The writer of Hebrews gives us hope today and shows us how we can increase our confidence in God to depend on God. Hebrews 4:14 says, "...let us hold fast to the confession." It means that we should be committed to the confession we have made. That confession is that belief and trust in Jesus Christ.

The image here calls back to the resurrection. Jesus was raised from the dead and therefore conquered sin. He ascended into Heaven to show His power over sin. This is my confession. This is your confession. This is our confession as the followers of Jesus Christ. We trust Jesus because He overcame sin. Our confidence is in the work of Christ—His sin-crushing, death-defying, life-giving work. That is where our confidence lies.

Honestly, I don't trust myself because I know trusting my own securities will fail me. I am reminded daily that people will fail me and that I can fail myself. I am learning more every day that I have to trust Christ. This trust in Christ gives me the confidence to ask Him for my needs. It is this trust in Christ that I am before you, now boldly sharing the message God has placed in my heart.

Why can I trust Jesus Christ? Why can you trust Jesus Christ? Why should we trust Jesus with our deepest needs and problems? The writer of Hebrews lists seven reasons to trust Jesus.

First, Jesus is a high priest who has access to God. Yet, He also has access to us. Because Jesus is God, He has access to God. He is co-equal to God and lives with God. Because Jesus is human, He is accessible to us also. As the high priest, Jesus presents our concerns before God. Jesus prays for us. Jesus can bring all of our concerns to God.

Second, Jesus is remarkable. He is great. Jesus is not just any priest. He is not just any high priest. He is more remarkably great than any other. The Greek word *μεγάλος* (*megalos*) here used to describe the kind of high priest is where we get our word "mega." Jesus is larger than life. He is supremely better than any other go-between.

Third, Jesus is supernatural, passing through the heavens. A high priest could only stand in God's presence on Earth and present prayers. Jesus is the Great High Priest, *μεγάλος* (*megalos*) Priest, because He is supernatural. He left Earth and now presents our prayers for us in God's presence.

Fourth, Jesus is relatable. He is God's son. Because Jesus is supernatural, He can relate to God. Because Jesus was human, He can relate to us. Unlike any other priest, Jewish or otherwise, Jesus is the perfect mediator. He knows both sides of the conversation. Jesus knows both parties very well. He knows God very well. Jesus knows you and me very well. Jesus is the most relatable Person to place our confidence in.

Fifth, Jesus, therefore, knows how weak we are. He knows that it is hard for us to ask. We feel so unworthy to ask for help because of our sin. Jesus knows this dilemma. Yet, He can help us because He overcame the dilemma.

Sixth, Jesus was sinless. He was tested from His humanity. Yet, Jesus was sinless because of His divinity. But don't think that Jesus was never truly tempted. He spoke to Satan and told Him to stay away (Matthew 4:10). He had to pray against the temptation to avoid the cross. Yet, He overcame temptation.

And seventh, Jesus is empathetic to our prayers because He was sinless yet tested. Jesus knows what it feels like to be tempted. He knows what it feels like to pray and ask God to help. We all need someone to empathize with our problems and weaknesses without condemning us. Sometimes that is enough to get us through, just to know that someone else understands what we're going through.

In closing, I would like to share a story from *Prince Caspian* written by C. S. Lewis. In this book, there is a child named Lucy. She encounters Aslan after not seeing him for a long while. Aslan is the Christ-figure in the story. "Aslan, you're bigger," she says. "That is because you're older, little one," answered Aslan. "Not because you are?" she asked. "No, I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger."¹

The more mature our faith, the bigger God will be for us. As our vision of God becomes clearer and we understand His enormity, we learn to rest in Him. We can grow in our ability to depend on God more fully by increasing our knowledge of God found in the pages of Scripture and the universe. Knowing how competent our God is assures us to depend on God more fully. Therefore, I pray that we all put an extra effort to increase our knowledge of God in prayer and meditation in this Season of Lent. Amen.

¹ Lewis, C. S. (1985). *Prince Caspian: The Chronicles of Narnia*. New York, NY: Collier/MacMillian. p. 136.