



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

A Devotion During This Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic First Sunday in Lent, February 21, 2021

Near

Mark 1:9-15

1:9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

1:10 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.

1:11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

1:12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.

1:13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

1:14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God,

1:15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

For the last twelve months or so, death has felt near, perhaps nearer than we can remember in recent times. Many have succumbed to COVID-19, while many of our senior sages and elders have simply come to the ends of their earthly sojourns and have joined the ancestors. Still others have met untimely and deaths due to continued anti-Black violence that still runs amuck. Death has felt so near.

In Mark's gospel, he continues to tell the story of Jesus almost as if Mark is using Twitter to write his gospels, short, quick, and with as few characters as possible. Jesus is baptized by John; and, Jesus is affirmed as Son and Beloved! Immediately, the Spirit sends him to the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. John is arrested and Jesus proclaims the good news, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near..."

This Lent, it seems hard to give up anything since death, sickness, loss, grief, and disorientation all seem to be so near. It feels like we have given up so much already. The news that the kingdom of God has come near feels strange to some of our ears and hearts. Injustice remains and comes near and even enters and takes up residence in our communities, cities, and countries. Forty

days of Lent feel like a bit too much given that we already feel like we are in the wilderness, being tormented, tempted, and tried.

Yet we still hear the savior's words, "The kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe the good news." Even when we cannot see it clearly, can we believe it? Of what shall we repent? Can we give up those things that might weigh us down, that might prevent us from running to catch up or reaching to catch on to the kingdom? How will we fight for justice and righteousness? How will we, ourselves, preach the good news? How will we fast, pray, and give to respond to the call of the kingdom? It is near!

TALK: Take a moment to be silent, reflect, and share (write down)—Reflecting on the scripture, where is your "wilderness"? Are you still there or have you come out on the other side? Elaborate.

PRAY:

Almighty God, you have promised forgiveness to those who repent. Convict me of my sins. May I be contrite (sorry) as I reflect on my sins during this Lenten season. Give me strength to turn from the ways of sinful destruction. Lead me on the path of eternal life. Give me a clean heart, and uphold me by the Holy Spirit. AMEN

By Bishop Jeffrey N. Leath, Presiding Prelate of the 13th Episcopal District, AME Church

ACT:

1. Based on your reflections from the TALK section, what can you do to help others find the healing they need? If you have not already done so, make a plan for how you will observe the remainder of Lent. (How will we fast, pray, and give?) In this Lenten Season, do what you can to protect the health of others and yourself by practicing social distancing as much as possible, washing your hands often, and wearing face covering to help prevent the spread of COVID-19— See: <http://www.amechealth.org>.

2. See also the activity that accompanies this devotion.

3. 2021 Liberation and Unity Lenten Devotional: <https://www.amazon.com/LIBERATION-UNITY-Lenten-Devotional-Meditation-ebook/dp/B08TGHQ3TX/ref=sr/1/1?crd=2PZK8J6YGY2LB&dchild=1&keywords=2021+lenten+devotional+liberation+and+unity&qid=1612922064&srefix=2021+liberation+and+unity,aps,159&sr=8-1>

Song:

Thou My Everlasting Portion
(Close to Thee)
AMEC Hymnal, #396

1. Thou my ev-er last-ing por-tion, More than friend or life to me,
All a-long my pil-grim jour-ney, Sav-ior let me walk with Thee.

Refrain

Close to Thee, close to Thee, Close to Thee, close to Thee;
All a-long my pil-grim jour-ney, Sav-ior let me walk with Thee.

2. Not for ease or world-ly pleas-ure, Nor for fame my prayer shall be;
Glad-ly will I toil and suf-fer, On-ly let me walk with Thee.

Refrain

Close to Thee, close to Thee, Close to Thee, close to Thee;
Glad-ly will I toil and suf-fer, On-ly let me walk with Thee.

3. Lead me through the vale of shad-ows, Bear me o'er life's fit-ful sea;
Then the gate of life e-ter-nal May I en-ter, Lord, with Thee.

Refrain

Close to Thee, close to Thee, Close to Thee, close to Thee;
Then the gate of life e-ter-nal May I en-ter, Lord, with Thee.

Physical space—You may wish to create a dedicated space for your time of devotion. You may choose to place a candle, bible, and special symbols or material/fabric to help you focus and center during this time of reflection and prayer.

If you use this meditation and exercise in a time of family or group devotion, share in the leadership; allow different persons to read or lead different parts of this meditation.



The Christian Education Department will continue to develop resources that can be used as times of personal and collective devotion and study during this pandemic to help us all sustain and strengthen our faith and resolve.