

Sermon Title: **“He was in the wilderness forty days”**

Bible: **Genesis 9:8-17 & Mark 1:9-15**

Where & When: at Gilroy UMC on the first Sunday in Lent, February 21, 2021

Audience: about 30 YouTube Viewers

Opening Prayer

O Lord, we are weak and broken. We have failed. We have messed up. We come to you as who we are. As your first covenant of the rainbow, have mercy on us. As you are with Jesus in the wilderness, please be with us. You are our God. Please be with my lips and mouth in your love and grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

1. The First Sunday In Lent

Lent in 2021 started last Ash Wednesday. Not counting Sundays, Lent is a season of forty days. The forty days represent the time Jesus spent in the wilderness, enduring the temptation of Satan and preparing to begin his public ministry. Like Jesus in the wilderness, Lent is a time of repentance, prayer, fasting, self-examination, and reflection. We are broken. We are weak. We are vulnerable. As we confess on Ash Wednesday, we remember that we are dust, and to dust we shall return.

However, on this day that the Lord has made, I hope for us to remember God's great love and grace. Sundays are always little Easters. When we count Lent as forty days, we do not count Sundays. That's because they are not Sundays "of" Lent, but Sundays "in" Lent. It is the Lord's day. Today is the first Sunday in Lent.

2. The First Covenant

Today, we hope and anticipate the victory and the Resurrection. But God's way might be different from our way. Today's Scripture readings came from the lectionary of the first Sunday in Lent. The Genesis reading is about the covenant. When we read this covenant carefully, it is very strange. There is only what God said. There is nothing Noah said. When a couple gets married, each side should say "I do." When we make a deal, each side should agree with the deal and sign for it. If one side does not agree, we cannot make a deal. But in this covenant, God made a deal with God-self, for Noah, all generations, and all creatures. God sets up the limitation to God-self. God created heaven and earth. God destroyed the destroyers. God is powerful enough to create and destroy. But, God denies God-self. Yes, God is the Creator. Yes, God is justice. In this covenant, I see that God is Love. God decided to love all of us, who are broken, weak, and vulnerable. God changed God-self to love us, who are dust. God's love is steadfast. In this short passage of Genesis, God uses the verb "establish" and "remember" a total of six times. God confirms God's first covenant to God-self again and again. When we are weak, it is okay, because God gives us strength. When we fail, it is okay, because God guides us to try one more time. When we are broken, it is okay, because God heals us. This God is our God.

3. Jesus was in the wilderness forty days

In the Gospel reading of Mark, right after his baptism, Jesus was taken and Jesus was in the wilderness. Right after the voice from heaven said, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased," Jesus was in the wilderness forty days. He was even taking the risk of temptation by Satan, and of living with wild beasts. Jesus was the son of God. He did not need

to be in the wilderness. He did not need to be tempted by Satan. He did not need to take risks. But he did. Jesus did all of these things because Jesus loved us, more than Jesus-self. Jesus wanted to be with us on the earth, just like us. The world is not suffering-free nor challenge-free. There is a time of wilderness, just like this isolated time. There is a time of many temptations. There is a time of living with the wild ones. Many times, we are weak, we fail, and we are broken. Jesus was in the wilderness forty days. It is neither to punish nor destroy us. I believe that Jesus was in the wilderness to be with us, as a human. God became a human to be with us, and God lived as a human to suffer with us and to save us. As much as God denied God-self, God loves us.

4. How much does God love us?

How much does God love us? In the first covenant of the rainbow, God changed God-self. Jesus, the Son of God, was in the wilderness forty days, like we are in this challenging world. God denied God-self. That's because God wants to be with us, to love us, and to be our God. During this Lent, I hope for us to meet this God. This self-denial God is our God.

Closing Prayer

O Lord, you first came to us with self-denial and love. When we are broken, when we fail, when we are weak, please open our eyes to see your love and presence. We are your people. You are our God. O Lord, please lead us to you more and more. In Jesus' name. Amen.