

Mark 1: 9-13
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Two weeks ago, we stood around the font up front, laid our hands upon the water, prayed for the Spirit to be with us, and baptized Miles David. It was a beautiful service full of promise. We reminded ourselves and told Miles of God's covenant with him. That God is with *each* of us in all of life – God claims us as God's very own. And we can live in that security.

This morning, it is time to move a step further into that story. It is time to really explore what it means to be, to live and claim, that covenant of baptism. What do we discover when we really stop to consider the other side, so to speak, of baptism – not God's give to grace to us, but our answer of responsibility?

What does it mean to be in covenant relationship with God? This Lent we will be exploring just that.

In our passage this morning, Jesus is baptized, claimed as God's very own son, and then he immediately sets out into the wilderness for forty days.

For forty days. That should sound a bit familiar. Last Wednesday marked the beginning of Lent – our spiritual forty days in the wilderness. (The days get counted by not including the Sundays, as in church tradition.)

Our model, Jesus, knows that this relationship that has been established with God means more than just grace for him – it also means it's going to *require* something from him. And so it does for us as well.

We don't launch into Lent, and Lenten practice, just because it seems like maybe it would be a good thing to do – like cleaning the floor of the car every once in awhile. We do so because to

be in relationship means that we put in effort. That both parties are changed by the gifts and burdens of the other – we give and take. Relationships require work.

Consider any significant relationship you've been in. The more the two of you really work at exploring your connection, then the more the two of you really examine yourselves honestly. In relationship – at least the ones that work – both parties make an effort to clean the soul, to know themselves so that they might be fully present, to be their best so that one can be strengthened by the other.

As it is true of our temporal relationship, so it is with our sacred one. One way to talk about covenant – like the one we make at baptism – is that it is a *choosing* to be in relationship with God. God claims us and *we claim God* in return.

Two weeks ago we talked about the sweet joy of falling in love with God – and just last week we read from Father Arrupe those very words. Isn't that the subtext to baptism? Isn't that feeling we had, in some important way, as we stood around the font and lifted Miles up in celebration?

Lent allows us to hold the other half of relationship up as well – the half that includes our responsibility to really know ourselves and to be willing to *expose* our true selves to the One who, in turn, share their selves with us.

Part of this experience is recognizing the aspects within ourselves that need to change if we are to truly be connected to the other. All relationships demand some sacrifices as a common life together is forged.

We asked ourselves on Ash Wednesday, what was it that we want in our lives to be burned up by the flame of God's love. We symbolically burned those burdens in the flames, before we marked our foreheads with the sign of the cross, in ash.

But this is only the opening act of Lent. Ash Wednesday is simply the doorway – the question mark – how will you engage?

I know there are many competing demands on our time, such that we often lose track of ourselves. I know that there are a lot easier or more fun opportunities with which to distract ourselves between now and Easter.

Sharing with God who we really are, what we truly want, how we see this relationship going forward, takes time and energy and effort. That is the real work of Lent. And as in all our earthly relationships, the more energy we put into doing this for God the more we will sense God doing it for us. The more we will know who *God* really is, what *God* truly wants, how *God* sees our relationship going forward.

Baptism led Jesus directly into a wilderness time. A time of intentional reflection, revealing, and temptation. Our community celebration of baptism two weeks ago set the stage for us to also find – *make* - the time to do the hard, but good work of our relationship with God as well.

This Lent, as we explore our own growing covenant with God we will have opportunity to explore together other covenants God has made with humanity. It is my hope that reviewing them will inspire us. Their covenants belonged to their time and situation – but they will, I pray, help each of us in this time develop our own covenants with God.

That like Marie Howe, we will show up to the task – with intention and honesty. We will engage with what we've got and not try to hide. For some of us –it's deeper prayer practice, for others of us it is getting out of our own story and into someone else's, for some it is a time to winnow distractions and for others it is time to take on the new.

May we all, this Lent, taste again the beauty of being loved by Our Creator. And may we all, like Jesus in those wilderness days, come to terms with what we need to do to cleanse our hearts and share our dreams and thus renew our own covenants with God.

Amen.