

On the Wandering Way **Luke 3:21–22; 4:1–13**

The Ash-Cross... Grace

On Ash Wednesday, we began our Lenten journey. Lent is a time to slow down. A time to pause our busy lives and look closely at the road we've been walking—where we have been, and where we are headed. And Lent begins by facing a simple truth: we are mortal.

At Haven UMC, an older member held back tears as she heard, “You came from dust, and to dust you shall return,” and received the cross of ash on her forehead. But at Asbury, our youngest member, Elizabeth—only six months old—smiled brightly as the ashes touched her forehead.

In that moment, I felt something holy: the beginning and the end of our pilgrimage meeting in one place. Tears and smiles under the same ash-cross. Yes—we are fragile. We come from dust, and we return to dust. And yet, the good news is this: God's grace does not leave us on the way. So during Lent, I pray we will remember our beginning and our ending—and turn our hearts again toward God, the true destination of our lives. Amen?

The Wandering Way

[PPT] Have you seen the movie *The Way*, starring Martin Sheen? It tells the story of a father named Tom who takes an unexpected pilgrimage after the sudden death of his son. Tom's son, Daniel, begins walking the Camino de Santiago in Spain. But on his very first day, he is caught in a storm in the Pyrenees and dies.

Tom—an eye doctor—has lived a stable, planned, predictable life. He goes to France to recover his son's body. But something changes in him. He decides to walk the road his son could not finish. He places his son's ashes in his backpack and begins the pilgrimage.

For centuries, pilgrimage has been a spiritual practice in many religions. In Christian history too, pilgrimage has meant leaving comfort behind, walking an unfamiliar road, and meeting ourselves—and God—more deeply.

In today's Scripture, Jesus also begins a journey. Led by the Spirit, Jesus enters the wilderness. Have you ever stood before a vast wilderness? I still remember looking out over the wide wilderness at Canyonlands National Park. It stays with me.

The wilderness is a strange place. In one sense, you can go anywhere because it's a vast, open space. But in another sense, there are no clear signs. No obvious markers. No easy map. You *can* go anywhere... and yet you don't always know where you *should* go. And that is why, in the wilderness, wandering is almost unavoidable.

In the movie, Tom starts confidently. “Here we go!” he says. But right away, he takes the wrong path—and he has to turn back. Not once, but twice. And I want us to remember this: When we step out of our familiar ways and begin walking with God, “wandering” does not automatically mean we are lost. As Tolkien famously wrote, “Not all those who wander are lost.” Sometimes it is in the wandering that we finally meet our true selves.

Wandering Means Facing Our True Selves

Pilgrimage is a journey of facing who we really are. And that is not easy. Why? Because this journey doesn't only reveal our best self. It also reveals our worst self. Maybe that is why Scripture describes this journey as a confrontation with the devil. In the wilderness, Jesus is tested. We can read that as a spiritual being testing Jesus. But we can also read it as Jesus facing

the “inner demons”—the forces inside us that try to keep us from standing fully as God’s beloved.

Facing ourselves honestly is hard. We often hide behind busyness. Or we hide behind the sentence, “This is just how I’ve always lived.” These days, one program I sometimes watch is a Korean show called *Divorce Mediation Camp*—where couples seriously considering divorce receive counseling. (Some of you might think, “Pastor, are you and Juhee not doing well?” Don’t worry—absolutely not.) I watch it because of the counseling scenes. And what I see again and again is this: people carry deep pain. And often, they don’t fully see what is happening inside them.

One wife says, “My husband doesn’t love me. He’s indifferent. I get angry. We fight. And then I shout, ‘Let’s divorce!’ and the conversation ends.” But in counseling, what is revealed is something deeper: fear. She had lost her beloved parents early. Deep inside, she carried this fear: “The person I love will leave me. I will be abandoned again.”

And do you know what she did—almost without realizing it? To protect herself from being abandoned, she pushed her husband away first. And when he chased after her and held on, she felt temporary relief. But the husband was devastated. He loved her deeply. He cried and said, “I love my wife so much. It hurts that she can’t see it.” As counseling continued, the wife finally faced what was underneath: the wounded child inside her. And that is where healing began.

The truth is, many of us carry a wounded child inside. And many of us have inner patterns—inner demons—that pull us toward unhealthy roads. Lent invites us to face them. To meet them honestly. And to step onto a road that may not feel comfortable—a road that may feel unfamiliar. Sometimes we have to take, as one book title says, “The Road Less Traveled.” And that road often looks like the wilderness.

The Wilderness Is Where We Meet God

In today’s passage, Jesus is baptized. And Jesus hears a voice from God: “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” Then—immediately—Jesus goes into the wilderness

In Scripture, the wilderness appears again and again as a place where people hear God’s voice in a new way. Some people connect the Hebrew word for “wilderness” with the idea of “word” and “speaking.” We don’t have to press that too hard. But spiritually, we recognize the truth: Often, it is when life feels like a wilderness—when we don’t know which way to go—that God’s voice becomes clearer.

But we don’t like wandering. We don’t want to get lost. We want clear answers. Yes or no. Right or wrong. We want to walk with zero mistakes. A few months ago, I received a counseling phone call that felt a bit unusual. A woman asked, “I don’t plan to get married... but can I still date my boyfriend?” She explained that the Bible talks about purity, and she was afraid of disobeying God. She kept circling the question, hoping for a perfect, clean answer. I kept asking, “Why?” and “What’s really going on in your heart?” Finally she asked directly: “So... can I date him or not?” And when I said, “Of course,” her voice instantly brightened. “Thank you,” she said—and she hung up. Maybe it was a desire to be faithful. Maybe it was fear of making mistakes.

But here is the paradox: The place where we often hear God most deeply is not the place where everything is perfectly clear—it is the wilderness, where we admit we don’t know, where we feel lost, where we are forced to listen.

The Temptation of the Shortcut

And here is another truth: In the wilderness, you don't only hear God's voice. You also hear temptation more loudly. In today's text, Jesus wanders for forty days and is tested. And the core of these three temptations is one thing: Take the shortcut.

"Turn these stones into bread." Skip the process. Skip the patience. Do whatever it takes—right now—for survival. "I will give you all the kingdoms of the world." Skip the cross. Skip the painful way of love. Take power quickly, by the world's methods. "Throw yourself down from the top of the temple." Don't wait for God's time. Prove yourself now. Get attention now. Be admired now.

The devil understands our hearts. The devil understands our impatience. The devil understands how much we hate wandering. So the whisper comes: "If you are God's child, why take the hard road? Why suffer? Why struggle? Here—take the faster way. The easier way." But Jesus refuses every shortcut. Why? Because a shortcut that skips tears, struggle, turning back, and waiting—also skips deep communion with God.

On pilgrimage, the goal is not simply reaching the destination. The goal is who we become *while we walk*. In *The Way*, Tom walks nearly 800 kilometers carrying his son's ashes. What if he had taken a train instead? What if he had chosen the shortcut? He would never have understood his son's heart. He would never have opened his heart to companions on the road. He would never have found reconciliation. He would never have faced his own wounded child and begun to heal. Blisters, wrong turns, tears, exhaustion—that "foolish wandering" became the very path where Tom was transformed.

And Lent is the same. There is no shortcut in faith. So if this Lent feels like wilderness to you—if you feel lost—do not be afraid. Jesus also wandered in the wilderness for forty days. If you feel frustrated because you cannot see the answer—do not despair. Even that can be grace. Because that empty, unclear, wilderness time can become the moment when you hear the quiet voice of God.

So let us not fear the holy wandering. Let us refuse the devil's impatient shortcuts. And let us walk with Jesus—who is The Way. Even when we shake. Even when we turn back. Even when we feel lost. Jesus walks beside us. May we finish this beautiful, holy road—this Lenten pilgrimage—together with Jesus, all the way to the end. Amen.