

Lent 1 St Leonard's Denmark 13th February 2005
Acknowledging our hurts. Rev Karen Urquhart

I have been thinking a lot about the Wilderness. Being in the wilderness for an extended period of time would make us very hungry. Greater hunger is likely to equate with a greater likelihood of being tempted=greater 'self-justification' for giving in to temptation. Often I see Life as a wilderness experience. I think if we are honest with ourselves there is a level of unrest in all of us.

An incompleteness. A deep longing. We are all hungry and wandering restlessly-our home is with God and nothing material can fulfill that gulf we feel. Sometimes 'angels' minister to us - we are refreshed and see some purpose in it all.... but mostly we feel alone...we are hungry and we are tempted to lose our sense of calling. We lose sight of God and all sorts of things come along and we try desperately to feel satisfied or at home-we forget that only God can fill this space + longing.

Jesus' temptation shows us how totally human he was. Even he was capable of being seduced by comfort, power and pleasure. It's not surprising we face temptation too. We all like to feel comfortable. Jesus spending 40 days in the desert would have made him far from comfortable.

Sometimes just a week camping – roughing it with no microwave, kitchen sink or TV is difficult.

But sometimes we need to choose to get outside our comfort zone.....and tread the potentially dangerous path of the wilderness. Our journey through is often very challenging and all sorts of temptations abound to discourage us and distract us from our purpose of seeking God.

Lent is the time traditionally set aside by Christians as a time of wilderness. A time to get beyond our comfort zones and to refocus on God. A time to leave behind baggage that weighs us down and to come to realize our true home is with God. For some of us Lent might be a time to give regular prayer a priority in our day...or perhaps a time of self-denial will help us move closer to God. Giving up these things go some way in expressing our desire to put God first.

But lent is a time of reconciliation. A time to tackle head on things that hinder us in our growth into mature Christians....It a time to purge our Spiritual bodies of all the things that poison it and stop it from blooming. This baggage is often painful things from the past that we have run away from, buried somewhere inside us or have simply not dealt with. We all harbor some amount of these things and they make us ill- both spiritually, emotionally and even physically. Unresolved grief can result in all kinds of illnesses from chronic depression and mental illness to all kinds of physical symptoms that can result in cancers, heart disease and strokes. The poisonous snakes in the reading this morning represent the negative forces that can take hold of us and get in the way of our relationships with one another and with God....such things as jealousy, greed, unresolved grief and so on. It is by being able to take a look at them and acknowledge them that leads to our healing. Snakes high on poles may seem a bit obscure to us...but we look to Jesus, held high on the pole of the cross -high so all who gaze upon him can be healed and made whole.

Perhaps we have wounds that are self-inflicted- high expectations of ourselves that we never achieve. Perhaps we have hurts from our childhood that we carry. Perhaps we haven't allowed ourselves to fully express our grief at the loss of someone or something very significant in our lives. Perhaps we have deep pain resulting from a broken relationship. Maybe the pain we carry is related to a negative experience of the church or even within this parish. All these hurts can paralyze us and we are unable to function to our full potential and to move on in our journey towards God. We need to dare venture into the darkness of our past -to acknowledge what the things are that bind us and to seek healing.

During this lent we have an opportunity to enter the wilderness with Jesus and to be healed through the power of his cross + resurrection as we Enter into Easter. We will take a few minutes of silence now to examine the state of our emotional and spiritual health. Use this time to begin to enter the wilderness of your soul and to recognize those things that still hurt and remain unresolved... Everyone should have a piece of paper and a pen or pencil ...write any hurts down that come to mind-perhaps a single word is enough or a sentence or even a picture...take it home and continue to reflect over the coming fortnight...be as open as you can be...it is between you and God....Here is a box to place hurts...bring them to church and place in the box...perhaps come for a quiet visit in the week -sit silently with God and reflect on areas where you need his healing touch.