

First Sunday of Lent  
February 26, 2012  
Psalm 25:1-10

Our focus throughout Lent is opening doors for our being reoriented to deeper ways of growing as disciples of Jesus Christ

Doors through which we need the Spirit in us for us to enter through.

**In focusing on Psalms, we will be giving attention to reorienting our lives in the face of what disorients us.**

Disorientation, more often than not, are seismic events in our lives, shaking us from our orientations – the way we are comfortable with our lives.

Orientation is a necessary thing in our lives.  
Orientation gives us a focus, a foundation, helping us live out our lives.  
Orientation is our routines, our habits that bring order into our lives.

However, when our orientation is disturbed or confronted by disorientation  
– through a crisis, a health diagnosis, a job layoff  
– we are left to feel, “why me?”

We struggle in being disoriented and try to claw our way back to our places of comfort, our places of routine  
– **we long for life to be normal again.**

**But all too often, our orientations tempt us in the midst of our crisis of disorientation.**

They tempt us from considering how our lives might be reoriented around something new, something that is deeply rooted in the life of God.

**They tempt us** to forgo the difficult journey of change,

**They tempt us** to return to places where we are in control, places where things might not be great, but at least we know what to expect, places in which our lives are predictable.

**But what if disorientation is a gift in life?**

– Not necessarily a gift we put on our Christmas lists, but a gift that is given that offers a doorway to a new experience of living.

We do not relish being disoriented, but as Scott Peck expresses in the first words of *The Road Less Travelled*, “Life is difficult”

We are bound to face difficulties, become disoriented  
– the question becomes: how are we to respond to crises of disorientation?

It is in being disoriented that we find ourselves in a place where we are unsure of what to do, how to cope, how to deal with devastating news.

But that is when we notice what we have settled for in our old orientations.

Yes, the temptation is to go back to the way things were – but perhaps, the gift we experience in being disoriented is that we now have an opportunity to examine our lives in fresh ways.

In coming face to face with that we have settled for in our lives, we are introduced to a journey that embraces the possibility of reorientation

- a journey in which we do not know the outcome, cannot control the outcome
- but all we have is the promise of God who can be trusted; the promise of God who will walk with us through this time of disorientation, this desert time – that we will be led to the Promised Land

### **How do we respond to this invitation to a journey that leads us to being reoriented?**

When Israel was in the desert, they longed to go back to Egypt, because at least in slavery they knew what to expect

- their life of being reoriented in the desert was frightening, unnerving
- where were they to get food, water, how long would they be in the desert?
- how could they know what tomorrow would bring?

But eventually

- and I do not know if one can use the word “eventually” with a period of 40 years
- they made their way to the Promised Land
- a new place.

**As we focus during Lent on Psalms of Disorientation and Reorientation**, we are seeking to embrace being reoriented to new life that comes ultimately through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ!

Throughout Lent we will be presented with doorways that challenge us to see

- our old orientations more clearly; ways in which we have become comfortable
- our being disoriented in a new light
- so that we may be open to enter through these doorways and journey towards reorientation.

**We enter into this time of being disoriented through Psalm 25** – which is really not a psalm of disorientation at all

- **it is more or less an expression of our desire not to enter into disorientation**
- **it is a pleading with God to take us back to the way things were.**

**This psalm has to do with our struggle in trusting God.**

In our lives we have figured out how to live in the way things are

- we have figured out how to live in relationship with God and with others with a reasonable modicum of trust in God
- a level of trust we are able to muster in light of how life is going.

Yet, in the midst of disorientation we are confronted with our trust in God

- no matter how great or how little our trust in God is, we have a sense we would rather trust God in our old ways, than to venture out into the unknown
- we would rather move from disorientation back to our old ways, our old orientations, rather than being reoriented
- how do we know how to trust God when we are being reoriented?

The psalmist – attributed to King David – is expressing that he, and also the community – though we are unsure as to the exact situation – are troubled.

V. 17ff: “Relieve the troubles of my heart and free me from my anguish. Look on my affliction and distress and take away all my sins. See how numerous are my enemies and how fiercely they hate me!”

V. 27: “Redeem Israel, O God, from all their troubles.”

**Throughout this psalm there is a reminding of God as to who God is, and therefore, what God’s responsibility is to Israel.**

v. 1

“In **you**, YHWH my God, **I put my trust**.” - No one else, you!

And this statement of trust is repeated:

“I trust in you”

And so because I trust in you – “God you need to act the way you are supposed to act because we are in covenant with you”:

“Do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me”  
because, LORD, “No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame,  
but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause”  
– those whose ways are not oriented around yours.

**Look, Lord, I am looking to you** – “Show me your ways, YHWH, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for **you are God my Savior**, and my hope is in you all day long” – **no one else**

This prayer in this Psalm goes on reminding God, hoping that God remembers:

“Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old”  
– as far back as we can remember you have always been faithful to us.

And Lord, because of your mercy and love, “Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways”  
but instead, “according to your love remember me – for you, YHWH are good.”

And then vv. 8-10 summarizes what we have come to believe about God:

“Good and upright is YHWH; therefore he instructs sinners [us] in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right [yes Lord, we seek to be humble] and teaches them his way.

All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful toward those who keep the demands of his covenant.”

**There is nothing wrong about this prayer – it is rooted in what is true about God;**

**But we often find that we pray this prayer as a prayer of “going back” rather than “going forward”**

This is a prayer that recognizes that we are being disoriented and we are trying to convince God to take us back to the way things were.

It is a prayer of hope that we will not have to journey through disorientation,

**But instead** we pray to be rescued and brought back to our old ways, our old ways of being comfortable, our old orientations  
– if only we were able to be brought back there.

O LORD, please bring us back to the way things were – “Redeem us, O God from all our troubles!”

Yet, as I look at the grand sweep of God’s Story and Vision, **God is never about going back** – God is always moving us forward, seeking to reorient us in the ways of God

**We struggle with this sense of moving forward!**

[illus] of my near drowning – swimming lessons at Y – fearful of deep water/drowning so fearful of swimming in deep water – so afraid of going forward, I quit]

[Story of the church as well as we face being marginalized in our culture  
– often hear about going back to Acts 2

Yet, we cannot go back to NT – not a helpful orientation – need to move forward.

Anderson: Church ought to be more mature when Christ returns than when it began in Acts]

**If we are to grow in God – there can only be a going forward and that moving forward often takes us through times of disorientation.**

This pattern is evident throughout the unfolding of God’s Story and Vision –

God’s Story and Vision is not about going back to our old orientations, but always challenges us to move forward to a life that is reoriented, recreated, around something new

New ways of creating peace;  
New ways of living humanely;  
New ways of living out truth and justice.

**In our Gospel text, we see this pattern of moving forward from disorientation to reorientation, rather than a going back to old orientations.**

Mark 1:

v. 9 – Jesus comes to be baptized by John – in Matthew (3:13-15) we see how disoriented John is – “But John tried to deter Jesus, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’

To which Jesus replied, ‘Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then John consented.”

**A moving forward – a reorientation to a new orientation!**

v. 10f – Jesus is baptized, the Spirit descends upon him, God’s declares, ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’”

And then the Spirit leads Jesus into the desert, the wilderness (lit. “casts out” – ekballo – a forceful disorientation), to be tempted by Satan – what an inauguration present?

**But note** what happens in the temptation

– Satan tempts Jesus to take a step backward to embrace his divine orientation, not to go forward as God incarnate who has embraced our humanity and to live in that humanity being led by the Spirit.

In essence Satan is saying to Jesus – go back to displaying the power that is rightly yours as the Son of God, the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Trinity

– display your power as God

– **don’t be a mere human being.**

And Jesus responds, denouncing Satan, overcoming the temptation

– he will carry out his ministry embracing our humanity in utter reliance upon the Spirit of God

– (cf. Php 2).

**A moving forward – a reorientation to a new orientation!**

v. 14 – John is imprisoned – the one who was a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him’ is imprisoned.

And rather than Jesus going back to rescue him, to set him free

– Jesus sets out on his mission to proclaim the good news of God

“The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

Repentance

– not merely a being sorry for our sins – but **a turning around**, living life in a new direction, be reoriented

– living in a new orientation of God’s reign!

**A moving forward – a reorientation to a new orientation!**

Lent is a time of not merely reflecting on our past sins, merely seeking forgiveness,

We are challenged to embrace reorientation

**A time to move forward, a reorientation to a new orientation!**

**It is a time to learn not to fear our being disoriented**

For in our disorientations

– we are opened to the possibility of the Spirit of God reorienting us to being human and being community in radically new ways

As the Spirit “cast out” Jesus into the wilderness – to be oriented to God’s mission through disorientation, the Spirit also “casts us out” in our experiences of disorientation to embrace new orientations – to be reoriented!

I urge us not to fear disorientation, but in the midst of disorientation to learn to rely on God, talk to God, trust God.

Trust God and begin reading Psalm 25 in a new way.

Not as a prayer for going back to our old orientations, our places of comfort and predictability, but a prayer of trusting in God to lead us through our times of disorientation to a place of new orientation – trusting the Spirit of God to reorient both you and me.

Trusting God for something new!

– not a trust that leads us back to the way things were

– **but a trust that leads us through the desert, wilderness of our disorientation**

– and opens us up to be reoriented in a new orientation as we grow in being disciples of Jesus, in being human.

[illus]

Back to my “drowning” story:

– not wanting to go forward, so quit . .

– **until challenged to reorient to learn to swim while with friends on Lake Erie; I knew the how of swimming, but never encountered the fear of swimming. I put my hands in front of me – began to swim out into the deep water and swam through my disorientation to a new orientation.**

– now I am at home in the water.

**We can read Psalm 25 in 2 ways – (1) as a prayer for going back (old orientation) or (2) a prayer for going forward – reorientation!**

It is my hope that we learn to pray it trusting God to lead us through disorientation to new orientations – through Jesus, in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit!!