

Sermon: Visio Divina
Text: Luke 4:1-13
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Context: WWPC
Lent 1
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Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.

Luke 4:1



The wilderness can be a great and marvelous place. A place of grandeur and wonder. A place of awe and serenity.

The wilderness can also be a great and terrible place. A place of fear and danger. A place of hardship and suffering.

I know because I was present when both of those things happened.

I don't know if I've ever shared this story in a sermon. I do know I've shared it with some of you privately.

But in any case, I think it bears repeating here.

Some years ago, my best friend from college, Tom Weis, and I set off to join some friends of his for a sea kayaking adventure in Glacier Bay National Park, near Juneau, Alaska.

There may be no more pristine wilderness in all of America than Glacier Bay. Most of the park is only reachable by boat, or sea plane, and there are no trails anywhere in the land-based portions of Glacier Bay.

We rented sea kayaks, gathered all our gear, and hopped aboard the ferry boat that takes adventure seekers into the park.

Once aboard, you work out with the captain, ahead of time, where you would like to be dropped off, and where, and when, you would like to be picked up when you're ready to come home and leave the wilderness behind.

Just before we reached our drop off point, the boat stopped and a backpacker disembarked. We thought this was insane.

As I mentioned, there are no trails in Glacier Bay, just dense forest -- an unremitting wilderness that also happens to be filled with some of the biggest, most aggressive predators in North American, including grizzly bears and, I suspect, more than a few wolves.

A couple hours after we dropped off the backpacker, we reached our drop off point and we then proceeded to have an extraordinary few days paddling through the

pristine, glacier fed waters of Glacier Bay, all the while surrounded by a formidable mountain wilderness that was as awe-inspiring as it was intimidating.

Five days later the time came for us to be picked up, and when the ferry arrived, we loaded up our boats and settled in for the long ride back to Juneau, where our cars were parked.

But once again the boat stopped, this time to pick up the very same backpacker whom it had dropped off just before it dropped us off, five days earlier.

The haggard looking young man clambered aboard ship, and then, with a wild look in his eyes, loudly asked us, “Do you have any food?”

Turns out that on his first night out, this intrepid guy had violated the first and greatest commandment of backpacking in the wilderness. He’d gotten his matches wet.

So he had tried to survive on a diet of raw salmon and hard, uncooked pasta, but he just couldn’t stomach it.

The group I was with had had an unforgettably great time in the wilderness. But if our backpacker friend had somehow missed his rendezvous point, or if he had been late for whatever reason, there is a chance that, stuck in the wilderness without matches or food, he might have died.

A journey into the wilderness is no small thing. It can go either way. But as our Lenten journey is now about to begin, we are going to follow Jesus on his own journey into the wilderness.

We are going to do this figuratively, of course. And to do this we’re going to use our imaginations.

We’re going to use a technique called *visio divina*. Many of us are familiar with the idea of *lectio divina*, a practice of reflecting upon and listening for God’s word, as a specific scripture passage is read, repeatedly.

The idea is that each time the passage is read, you listen for nuances, and for surprises. You listen for that moment when the written word and the spoken word become the living word.

Today we're going to vary that practice. We're going to use not our ears but our eyes to try to discern God's word to us today.

I'm going to lead us through a guided mediation centered on the image on the cover of your bulletin.

First I want you to keep your focus wide. Try to take in the image as a whole. How does it make you feel?

Now, focus in. What specific details are your eyes drawn to? What is it that you are seeing? What feelings, or memories, or thoughts do these specific things evoke in you?

Now, I want you to imagine that you are about to set off into that wilderness for an extended journey. What might you be excited about finding there?

What might you be afraid of finding there? What might be your biggest temptations while you are there?

Finally, today, as your Lenten journey is about to begin, what did you perceive God's living word to you to be?