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Pastoral Message
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Wilderness School

Many great educational organizations in the past decade or two have added wilderness training to their curricula. Some examples include Outward Bound, college orientation programs, and Elderhostel travel seminars.

My impression is that these offerings fill a void once met by “vision quest” experiences like those that were a normative part of coming-of-age experiences in Inuit and Native American cultures.

We have a similar offering within the Christian culture, and it is extended to people of all ages and life stations. We call it Lent. Lent is the liturgical season when we reflect on the most challenging times in Jesus’ ministry beginning with the temptations and culminating with his crucifixion.

Lent has never been the most popular season in the Christian year. Who wants to go on a journey without a map? Who wants to spend six weeks in a place without running water and groceries? Perhaps only the most outdoorsy among us.

And yet, we go—often unwillingly—to places that we would not choose to go, and we face challenges that we may prefer to avoid. We go, not so much because we are Christians, but because we are humans. We go, because challenge and deprivation are—at least to a degree and at least for a time—part of every human’s experience. Virtuous and vile, prosperous and poor alike—all grapple with challenges that cut to the quick of who we are, what we value, and how we respond.

So the lessons that we take from Jesus’ journey aren’t about whether it’s prudent to opt in or opt out. They are, instead, opportunities for self-discovery and strength training. They help us build capacity to meet greater challenges in the future. They teach us how to find nourishment in inhospitable climates. And perhaps most importantly, they remind us that we do not go it alone. Jesus has already marked the trail, and set us on this path together.

Arlene