

Thomas R. Cook
St. Stephen's Church - Edina Minnesota
9:00 and 11:15 a.m. Celebrations of the Holy Eucharist
The First Sunday in Lent – March 10, 2019

“Let Your Spirit Catch Up”

Scripture: Deuteronomy 26:1-11: 1 Lent C

Now, what was it I wanted to say to you all this morning...?

It's just awful, isn't it, when you have so much going on in your mind that things just ---poof!--- they go right out. I suppose our minds get so busy, our agendas so full, our responsibilities so many, so much going on that we take on too much, and we're always thinking about the next thing we have to do, and we forget what we need to be doing now. Here's a question for you: Can we remember what we were supposed to remember not to forget?

There's a story* about some porters laboring under their heavy loads of baggage and equipment, carrying all these things across a vast, barren, and sweltering African plain all for an ambitious scientist obsessed with finding a particular herd of African elephants before the end of mating season. And the scientist drove the porters relentlessly for miles and miles across the grasslands in the bright sun and

heat, until sometime on the fourth day of their journey, the porters simply stopped, laid down their loads, and curled up under the scanty shade of a lone spindly tree. And the scientist was furious that they were not pressing on when time seemed so short. Yet the men refused to move, even though they appeared to be catching their breath. And the scientist raged and called them to move on, yet the men only mumbled something in their own language, which the scientist, in all his years in their country, had never had taken the time to learn, and the porters stayed put under the tree. So the scientist bellowed to his translator to tell him what was going on, and the translator said quietly, “Sir, these men have moved fast and far for you, but they will go no farther now until they give their spirits time to catch up with them.”

For forty days, Jesus did nothing in the desert. Well, nothing productive really, except to fast, pray, contemplate, consider, be tempted. Nothing really except, perhaps, to give his spirit time to catch up with him. Oh yes, people were beginning to notice him now. They were beginning to wonder about him. They were likely beginning to expect something of him. And he was likely beginning to give it. So much on his mind, so much on his heart: *What about the family business? How should I be helping my mother and father? Have I done all they have asked of me? Yet I need to begin to speak of the heavenly father. I need to get out on the road and visit the towns and villages and cities of my people. I need to heal and preach. I finally was baptized, but now I will need to find friends,*

consider what I want to say to the people, come up with a travel schedule, make my plans. So, much to do. So, into the desert I will go to do... nothing. Jesus knew when he needed to allow his spirit to catch up with him. And after forty days, the devil thought Jesus would be weak. Are you kidding? Jesus had used this time of deprivation and struggle and prayer to regain his strength of spirit. Though his body was undoubtedly tired, his spirit was prepared. And he resisted the temptations to eat more, take more, do more than was necessary for a good and faithful life.

We need time too for our spirits to catch up with us. Perhaps we haven't created the situations that require so much attention or work. Perhaps we haven't volunteered to be so busy or so troubled by our many, many responsibilities. But are we deliberately seeking to balance the requirements of living with the needs of the spirit? Do we ever sit down, put off at least some of the load, and see if our spirits are still with us? Do we strengthen ourselves to resist the temptations to eat more, get more, do more by paying attention to our spirits in this moment, now? If you have ever wondered why the church formally observes a season like Lent, well, this is the reason. We need to let our spirits catch up with us, and we can't do it by pressing on and on without a time to reflect, to confess, to forgive, even to celebrate. Yes, celebrate... in Lent, no less.

Moses tells the people of Israel to be formal and respectful and humble in bringing before God each year the first fruits of their harvests. He commands them to be still long enough each year to remember not who they are today alone, but who they and their ancestors once were: wandering nomads with no place of their own, descendants of slaves who had no say over themselves, no power or right to dream of their futures or build their own families and nations. So when the time came that they were blessed by the harvests from their own farms and lands, they were to bring a portion before God, offer it to the priests, and remember that they were once people who had nothing, and were now people who had something, and their gratitude to God was thus expressed. And then, when all the people had gathered and presented their offerings, they were to celebrate together and feast upon the bounty that God had given them. Maybe this is the first recorded official pot luck supper in our Jewish-Christian heritage. But above all, it was a time to settle down, be thankful, celebrate life together, and to let their spirits catch up with them.

So, that's what we do today. We celebrate the Holy Eucharist in Lent, even while we try to settle down a little, consider what is good about our way of living, and what falls short. Can I invite you today to let your spirit catch up with you in Lent? Would you be willing to consider what occupies your time and to lay down some things that are not really so necessary in order to take up a time of praying or serving

or repenting or forgiving? Is this the season to seek to be more with family or friends too long neglected? Is this a time to read the Bible like you have often said you would do? Is now the time to forgive someone who has harmed you, or to seek forgiveness from those you may have harmed? It's worth considering.

Ah, yes, I remember now what I wanted to say to you all this morning, but I think I have already said it. Perhaps our spirits are already beginning to catch up with us...