

Last year I spent almost 2 weeks in El Salvador. We visited the place where Oscar Romero was martyred because he spoke for the people. I stood where he was shot celebrating the Eucharist. We visited sites where the people of El Salvador were massacred and tortured by a government that was partially supported by American money and weapons. I stood and listened as a man who survived a massacre talked about digging graves with his hands to bury the more than 500 people who were killed around him. Trauma that is hard to connect with even when you stand on the ground where it happened...ground that feels like it is still shouting. I felt hopeless in the face of such human evil...in the face of the awful things that we do to each other...

I asked the Episcopal Bishop of El Salvador...knowing what we know now, what would you have us do? Is there even anything we can do? So Bishop Baharona looked at me for a moment—and then smiled at our group—and...with deep and faithful eyes he said “Sit. Listen. Then go home and share these stories. Then when you’ve done that. Come back and listen again. Keep telling the stories of my people.”

This past January I was in Ecuador. One day, we heard from two incredibly bright women who run a brave environmental movement called “accion ecologica.” These women told us about the economy and the environment in Ecuador. They told us about working conditions that are close to slavery. They told us about indigenous communities who had been self-sustainable for thousands of years who are now unable to grow their own crops because of global warming. We sat and looked at heartbreaking statistics that demonstrated the violent degradation of our earth.

And so, they asked us to go home and to tell these stories—to talk about the crippling effects of global warming and the ways in which they perceive the global north has made it impossible for the global south to be self-sustainable. These women have received countless death threats because of their work.

Now, we find ourselves surrounded with images of an earth quake that killed far too many in Haiti. We are surrounded by stories. Even some that are closer to home. Stories of the poor. The homeless. Addicts. Corruption. Abuse. Domestic violence. Robberies. Disease. Suffering. You name it. In the face of all of this, it is easy to feel hopeless. Easy to feel helpless.

In our Gospel for today, Christ is in the desert. I wonder...if isolated in the desert...alone—unable to see God...I wonder if it would have been easy for Christ to be hopeless? Having spent 30 years on this earth at that point, would it have been easy for Christ to give up on the people around Him, to give up on the humanity He came to save?

Christ took human form...to experience everything that we experience...so that means He experienced the good and bad for 30 years. Was He made fun of on the playground? Maybe He was beat up as a teenager because he was a “wimpy pacifist.” Maybe he saw his parents and his family be discriminated against because they were Jewish...or because they were poor. I wonder how often He felt alone. Excluded. Hurt. Weak.

His time was no different than ours. There was corruption. People He loved failed Him. There were tragedies and disasters. There was human weakness and human fault. Even Jesus had moments when He must have felt successful—loved—whole...and moments when He felt rejected by His family, by His hometown, and perhaps even moments when He wondered what the point was? So, I wonder—if the easy thing would have been to give up hope?

Knowing that He was to die for our sins, sins committed to and against Him, I wonder if it would have been easy for Christ to just say...no. No, thank you. They're not worth it. They are cold. They are hard. They care more for themselves than anything else. When confronted and tested by the devil, I wonder how easy it would have been for Christ to take all the glory He was offered. In the face of this easy hopelessness, the complacency He could have chosen...

Christ shows His faith in us, in our ability to love, in our ability to be good, that He still sacrifices Himself for us...because He knows that we are more than that. He knows that we are not the sum of our mistakes and our sins...that we are created in the image of God. Christ chose us because of the good He saw in this life—the good amid the pain and the hardness. So when the devil tempts Him, there is no question. He refuses everything the devil offers Him. Even bread.

Christ cannot see God in the desert but He knows that God is there because of the time He has spent with Scripture, individually or at synagogue. Because of this, Christ responds to the devil, responds to evil, as One who knows He is beloved by God. "It is written..." He says, leaning on Scripture.

Nourished by Scripture and His relationship to God, Christ when faced with the chance to have everything but God REFUSES—and chooses nothing—chooses nothing in that desert but the hope of God and us...knowing that certain death faced Him when He left that desert. He empties Himself of all of His power, all of His dignity and becomes a sacrifice...It is this sacrifice we are called to remember and observe and be thankful for these 40 days. A sacrifice made from hope.

I have a classmate at Yale who declared to me and a few others last year that she "hates Lent." "It's depressing," she continues, "there are ashes and darkness, we're supposed to think about how bad we are and how we're going to die." I know a lot of people who feel this way. And it's just unfair. Yes, in Lent we are asked to remember our mortality—that much is true—but it is so that we might be reminded of the overwhelming love of God that saves us from death. Yes, a few days ago we wore ashes on our heads—ashes to remind us of humility—humility that is matched by the Grace of God. Ash Wednesday's ritual invites us to remember that when we die we return to dust, and that in this transition we are utterly dependent on the grace and the love of God—present with us in the form of Jesus Christ.

Lent is a time for us to prepare ourselves—in some of the ways in which Christ prepared—through study of Scripture and through time spent here, to build our own relationship with God. And yes, finally, Lent ends in death...in Christ's ultimate sacrifice for us... But Lent only ends in death so that it might serve as a reminder to us that though we might die—we are promised SO much more... It is a season of mystery—and a season of wonder—that is often characterized as without light and without hope—but this could not be further from the truth. Our hope comes from knowing that our God loves us more than we can possibly imagine—simply because we are His.

Lent is a time for us to tell and re-tell these stories. The stories of the Gospel and the stories around us that call us to action. These stories are hard to tell—because they are harder to hear—because they create controversy, because they make us uneasy, because they remind us of our responsibility to each other. Lent is a time to tell these stories—and to take action.

This Sunday we remember and are thankful for Episcopal Relief and Development. You all have done a wonderful thing in the last few weeks in donating more than \$10,000 to ERD for their efforts in Haiti. ERD is a fantastic organization that offers hope to many around the world—more than 2 million

people in 40 countries. Your help to them is a gift and a witness to Christ—as ERD seeks to be one of the visible, tangible arms of Christ in this world. But we cannot stop there.

We have hope in Christ who chooses us in the desert... who reaches out for Scripture and tradition that help sustain His relationship with God... We are called then, especially in this season, to do the same thing—to work on our relationship with God—to sustain it with scripture—in community, in this place—and to tell each other these stories...to have hard conversations—to remember those both near and far who are homeless, who are hungry, who are discriminated against, who are excluded based on race, color, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, or religion. We have hope in Christ who chooses us in the desert and who expects us then to seek to be like Him...sharing meals with the “outcasts,” and reaching out to touch the “lepers.”

Let us then, together, observe this holy season, not as if it is something we must live through to get to Easter...but as if it is a season full of the promise of hope and salvation. Let us observe this Lent as if it is an opportunity for us to bear witness to the evil in the world—to what is wrong in the world—and to the fact that we can, make a difference—that our privilege as the beloved of God requires us to share that love and tell that story...Let us use this season as a springboard forward. To make the choice that Christ made in the desert—the choice for life, the choice for the people around us, and the choice for God. AMEN.