

Lent1, Year C – March 6, 2022
Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Luke 4:1-13
Epiphany, Winnipeg

Over this past week and a bit a lot of stories have started to turn up again. We've seen the images of endless lines of traffic by day, long streams of headlights by night, car after car after car trying to find its way across the border, every car filled with the stories of one or two or five or more people leaving home and trying to get somewhere safe. We've seen people who walk, because all those cars have stopped. Last week you might have seen or heard an interview with a young Ukrainian woman, twenty-six years old, I think. She was deep underground in a subway station, with her cat and her computer that she might use for her animation work, and a few tins of food, and she wondered if she might be there for half a day, or maybe two days? Or you might have heard more recently about a woman and her grown children in downtown Kyiv, living together in her apartment. They stay away from the windows, and at night they don't open the fridge door because the light might make a target, and when the air-raid sirens go off they all go and find shelter together in the bathroom. She joked that she used to think she had way too many towels, but now she doesn't think that any more.

They sound like a lot of other stories. Stories from friends, stories from your parents, the stories you yourself have known and lived through, when you or you and your parents, or your grandparents or great grandparents moved from one place to another, crossing borders or oceans or mountain ranges, leaving behind wars or famines or just leaving behind a whole lot of nothing and hoping to find something in a new place. I've talked with a lot of friends this week who have

Ukrainian roots, and every one of them has talked about stories they've heard, or about relatives they're trying to get in touch with...a cousin they met on a trip there three years ago, an aunt they lost touch with a decade ago and they don't know how to track her down now to see if she's OK. We never talked about any of that before, but this week all those stories have come out again...and we know that people all over the world could tell tales like the ones being told now, in long lines of cars that seem to stretch on forever....

A few minutes ago we heard a piece of the story of the people of Israel as they are about to cross another border. You might recall the overall sweep of it: For hundreds of years they had been slaves in Egypt, and after all that time of being oppressed and worn down but persisting and surviving, they called out to God, and God got them out of Egypt and out of slavery. Along the way they had formed their own lineup of hundreds of thousands of people as they fled from a pursuing army, heading for who-knows-where, looking for a border to somewhere. Once that army and that slavery were far behind them, they crossed a kind of border into the wilderness, and for forty years they wandered, looking for the home that God had promised to give them. They were fugitives; they were wanderers; they were free; they were lost.

Today we pick up the story as they come close to the border to a new land that will be theirs, and after all those forty years their leader, Moses, tells them this: When you come into your new home that God is giving to you, and when you've harvested your crops, and when your fruit trees and vines have produced what they will give, put the first of everything you harvest into a basket, and take

that to the holy place, hand it over to the priest and say this: “I come from wandering people. My ancestors wandered. They travelled the world looking for food, they fled from an army when their slavery ended, now we’ve wandered in this wilderness. We were fugitives; we were wanderers; we were free; we were lost. We come from wandering people. And we’re about to wander into our new home.” And then Moses says, “After you’ve finished telling that story, take all of the good things you’ve harvested, and have a party with the people who have no land – that’s the Levites – and with the people who are among you who had to leave their community because of war, or famine, or plague, or maybe even because they’re running from the law. Remember that you come from wandering people, so have a party with the people among you who are wandering people themselves.”

The stories that we see unfolding in Ukraine these days - and there are stories like them always unfolding somewhere - are biblical stories, because God’s people have always been on the move, and been strangers somewhere. If the story we heard today is from Deuteronomy chapter 26, then the story of those lineups at the border between Ukraine and Poland is somehow Deuteronomy chapter 9,427. New chapters keep on being written. When you had to move, that was a chapter in the story, or when your grandparents hid from the oncoming army or you went to a strange place to be a student and it was scary crossing that border in the airport, or...whenever and wherever and however your stories of wandering or fleeing or starting over or looking for a safe place took shape, these are all chapters in that biblical story and that human story that keeps on being told. “We all,” as a good friend says, “come from moving.” Somewhere in our past

we've all wandered, sometime we've been strangers, just like anyone who wanders now, or is away from home, or is a stranger where we are at home.

We heard that other story this morning, the one about Jesus being tempted by the devil in the wilderness. He's been there for forty days and hasn't eaten anything and he's really hungry and probably kind of at his wits' end because who wouldn't be after all that?

So the devil comes along to test Jesus; to see how he holds up under pressure, and hunger, and exhaustion. When the test is finished there are three things that Jesus does not do: He doesn't turn a rock into bread to satisfy his own hunger. He doesn't accept an offer of all the power in the world. He doesn't jump off a tall building and cash in his divine protection card to keep himself safe. Instead, he ends up walking out of the wilderness and making himself at home among people who have no bread. He wanders along with all the people who have no power to rule over countries or cities or anything, and he takes to the road with the ones who have no special protection.

And, I don't know, he gets into the car with that couple and their kids who grabbed a thing or two and started driving west and hoping for Poland. He takes the escalator down and then another escalator and then another one deep into the subway station and plunks himself down on the bench next to that young woman with the cat and the computer and a tin of food or two. He hurries off to the washroom to take shelter with that woman and her kids in a downtown Kyiv apartment when the air raid siren goes off (and maybe he pops the fridge door

open just a crack and grabs a thing or two so they won't be hungry while they wait, surrounded by all those towels).

He wanders into all the wandering and waiting and worrying that has been a part of our stories all along. Jesus will walk with us through this season of Lent and beyond and into whatever wilderness we and the world might all be being led into ourselves. We will walk and wander with Jesus through this Lent to a cross that he can't transform or hide from or order away.

And then one day we'll stand by an empty tomb on the edge of the wilderness in shock or surprise or bathed in good news of great joy, just like the angels sang back when it all began...and we will see...we will see...that life really will win the day. That chapter's being written too. AMEN.