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## WORD MADE FLESH

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### **Fifth Sunday in Lent\***

Isaiah 43:16-21, Psalm 125/126, Philippians 3:3-14, John 8:1-11

Water in the wilderness. Not perfection on the mountain. Human experience sown with tears. Giving up on the perfection so natural for human beings to desire. Longing to enter into the sufferings of Christ by "reproducing the pattern of his death." Laying down our stones out of recognition. Recognition that, in our sin, we have solidarity with "the least of these my brothers and sisters."

Jesus frees us from our condemnations with the simple reminder that we are sinners. Isaiah, the Psalmist, and the Apostle Paul in the Letter to the Philippians speak about the solidarity of the company of sinners, giving up on our striving for perfection, entering into Christ's death, and shedding our acts of condemnation.

These are passages about the wilderness, the landscape of transformation, the place of entry into Christ's death. Christ's death is our death. We must give up, despair of our efforts, enter the exile in the wilderness. And why? All other places are places of the casting of the first stone, places of perfection, the rule of virtue, the rule of condemnation. They are places of death where the life-giving waters longing to flow out of the desert of human experience are blocked. They are places where the sowing in tears is prohibited, where one must place hope in perfection.

The Apostle expresses a longing to take his place "in the resurrection of the dead." This is not an idle wish for paradise. Rather, it is the recognition that only in co-suffering love, the love Christ expressed for all creation, for all the works of the Creator, do we live the "pattern of his death." Only in cosuffering love do we come to the fullness of life. When we are in Christ's death -- that into which we are baptized -- we are in solidarity with sinners, with ourselves, with Christ.

The perfection found only in Christ. The response of Jesus in the Gospel, his response to the women taken in adultery, reflects the perfection the Apostle seeks. Those who brought the women to Jesus wished to deepen her humiliation and take comfort in their virtue, their perfection under the normal order of things. Jesus, the Gospel tells us, draws on the ground, touches the earth, the dust from which we come, to which we return. Cast the first stone out of your virtue? Let those who touch the earth, those who mingle with the dust cast the stone.

Nothing in our sought-for perfection is solid, solid as stone. Only in Christ, only in cosuffering love, in recognition not condemnation, is the perfection of Christ, the perfection of the fullness of the human nature to be found. And then the waters of life will flow in the wilderness of desolation, in the parched landscape of our broken experience.

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