I’d like to begin today by taking a small look at the Gospel of Mark as a whole book. And one way to do that is to simply look at how the book begins, the opening scene. Because in the first few verses of the Gospel, Mark lays out how it is that we are going to connect to God. What kind of relationship are we going to have with God? Where is God found? How does this work? He is giving us the main theme of how we are going to connect to, or become aware of God’s presence and work in the world. So let’s just look at them and I would like to read this out of Eugene Peterson’s translation of the Bible called the Message. Mark, Chapter 1, verses 1 through 4.

The good news of Jesus Christ—the Message!—begins following to the letter the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Watch closely: I’m sending my preacher ahead of you; He’ll make the road smooth for you. Thunder in the desert! Prepare for God’s arrival! Make the road smooth and straight! (And then it happens). John the Baptizer appeared in the wild, preaching a baptism of life-change that leads to forgiveness of sins. And that life-change is repentance

So how does the prophet prepare us for God? To make the way smooth and direct into the presence of God? How do we connect to this lifechanging reality? Well, here comes the prophet, John the Baptist. And where is this prophet found and where does he take us? Answer: He is found and he takes us into the wild. Into the wild. Other translations say, into the wilderness. And there it is. This is the theme that will be developed throughout the Gospel. The whole theme about God is that we connect to God, the path is made straight when we are taken into the wilderness. Into the wild.

Now of this this isn’t the literal wilderness. It’s the experience of being taken outside the safety of what you know. You find yourself in a situation where you don’t really know what to do? When you don’t know what to believe anymore maybe. When life just get’s wild and crazy and it seem like everything is out of control. Where the world around us just seems to be going crazy. The old familiar patterns and ways of life seem to be falling apart. The prophet takes us there. Outside of what we know. Now the path becomes straight and road smooth. Now I turn to God. When God called Israel to freedom from slavery, where did they go? Out into the wild. Into the wilderness. For 40 years. Learning to connect to God.

See, where are you being led outside of what you know and are familiar with? I’m sure you are. Maybe you’re simply getting older. Maybe what you used to believe doesn’t really work any more. Maybe you have to deal with some kind of new technology. Today, all you have to do is turn on the news and you’re in the wilderness. It’s crazy. The old is passing away in so many ways. We live in a world where change is so rapid. Do you get the message? That’s where you connect to this life changing reality that God has for you. Outside of what you know. In the wilderness. In the wild. That’s the whole story of Jesus isn’t it? The whole story in Mark leads to the cross. Totally outside of what anybody knew or expected or had thought about. But that’s where it happened isn’t it. The disciples were led to the wilderness of the cross. And there they found a life-changing reality called repentance.

Now repentance is one of those words that has lost much of it’s meaning through overuse and misuse. Repentance is often understood as something like saying your sorry for something you did wrong. It’s primarily understood as being about misbehavior. But that is not what the word means. Repentance is a way of life. It’s a constant. And all it means is this. Think about how you are thinking. Repentance is a form of reflection. Rethinking, relooking. If you farm or are in any profession repentance is a way of life. New information is always coming along. You’re always looking at your operation, seeing where you could do better or improve something, or fix a problem. Hmm, I need to relook at this. That’s repentance. And that’s what happens when you find yourself in the wilderness, or outside of what you know. Wow, I need to rethink this. That’s repentance. It’s opening up to new information, and new insight.

Now of course in the Gospel of Mark there is much that stands in the way of this power of God that is found in the wildnerness. We’re in chapter 6 and throughout the story so far Jesus has been casting out demons. So much of the story leading up to todays text is casting out demons. We see it our Gospel today, the disciples are casting out demons. The demonic is everywhere. So there is this demonic power that resists the prophet, that resists Jesus, that blocks the message.

So what do you think it is? When you think of demonic power in the world, what do you think of? I think for most of us talk of demons is a bit comical. Hard to take seriously. But Mark is very clear here about what the demonic power is, the power that opposes God, and he refers to it on several occasions prior to our lesson for today. So I’ll put 2 references up on the screen where Mark is very clear about the nature of the demonic. The nature of the demonic power that opposes God.

The first reference is to Mark 1:34. “And he (Jesus) healed many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons, and he would not permit them to speak because they knew him. Now that’s interesting isn’t it? How can knowing who Jesus is, be demonic? What is the nature of the demonic power here? I already know. I don’t have to learn, or grow, or change. I’ve got it all figured out. Take a look at the second reference from Chapter 3 verse 11-12. Whenever the unclean spirits saw him (Jesus) they fell down before him and shouted “You are the Son of God”. How can that be demonic power, knowing that Jesus is the Son of god? What’s wrong with that? But he sternly ordered them to not make him known. See because what happens when you think you already know? What kind of person do you become when you already know that? When you simply stay with what you already know?

So now we’re ready for our Gospel lesson today I think. This surely has to be one of the most interesting stories about Jesus that we have recorded. Jesus comes to his hometown and his home church. That’s what synagogue refers to. And he teaches them what he’s been teaching everyone. And what happens? Sure. Jesus takes them into the wilderness doesn’t he? Outside of what they know. It’s wild isn’t it, and they are astounded. Where is all this coming from? What is this wisdom? It’s like their world is upside down. Now Mark has already given us a clue as to why this is happening. Because that’s where we connect to God. That’s where we learn about a life-changing reality. That’s where it happens. Outside of what I know.

But now watch what happens. And notice what gets in the way. Is not this the carpenter, the Son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us? And they take offense. In other words, they begin to reject Jesus and his message, and his teaching. Why? Because of what they already know. They already had Jesus and his family in a little box. They have already made up their minds about “that family”. That person. And so they simply could not accept new information that was outside of the box. And so of course, that cannot repent. They didn’t want to reflect, rethink, redo, reform what they already thought. They become the demonic power because they already know. They had already made up their minds about Jesus and his family. And so Jesus had little power there.

It is one of the most astonishing passages in the Bible. Jesus had no power in his hometown. What blocks our connection to the power of God in this Gospel? Sure, what we think we already know about God. What is the biggest obstacle the church faces today. Yeah, people think they already know what a church is. What’s the biggest obstacle to a pastor? Sure, everyone knows what a pastor is supposed to be. Nice little box, just for you. Maybe you’ve been put in a little box by your hometown. Ain’t fun is it? It’s not wrong to know things. The familiar is not bad. But it can be. And that’s what we’re up against today in our lesson. We connect to God best, when we are led outside of what we know. That’s faith. Trusting God enough, to get outside of what I think I already know. Now we’re open to something new. We are often afraid of the unknown. In faith we discover that we will meet God there.

And so how does our lesson end today. With Jesus sending out his disciples. Where to? Into the unknown. To people they don’t know. And how will people that they meet be open to the message? By welcoming those that they do not know. Jesus sends them into the wildnerness. And all the message is at this point is repent. Rethink, reflect, relook. Think about how you are thinking about other people. Repentence is very close to respect. Don’t get stuck in what you know. Don’t put me in box. Don’t put God in a box. Don’t put your neighbor in a box. Don’t put your wife in a box, or your husband, or you kids. There is lot more for you to know about God and your neighbor. That is casting out the demonic is it not? Dear God, continue to take us out into the wilderness where we can discover you and one another in new ways and cast out that demon that thinks it already knows. Amen.