

Sent out with words of approval (Mark 1:9-15)

The wilderness is hard enough. Kindness helps.

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Forty days is a pretty tall order.

When Jesus emerges from his baptism, a voice speaks from heaven: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Then "the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness" to be tempted. God's words of approval and love are still ringing in his ears; they are the strength he draws on and the hope he clings to. They bring him safely through the 40 days.

We rarely send the ones we love off into a literal wilderness. But we do send them out into situations we don't always understand. We send our kids into schools where they face demons in the form of academic stress, peer pressure, or bullying. We send our spouses into workplaces that may sometimes feel like lions' dens. We send our fellow church members out the door on Sundays into an unpredictable world.

What words of blessing do we give to them as we send them on their way? What do we give them to carry into the hard or scary places, for when they start to doubt their own worth? Do they leave knowing that in them we are "well pleased"? Or do they just remember that we were mad they didn't take out the trash again?

We are human, and even if we want to be the ever-supportive voice of compassion and encouragement to the ones we love, we will sometimes fail. As a result, sometimes our loved ones will leave the house thinking we are grade-A jerks. While we might not admit it, that will seem fair to us, because we will feel that way too.

The world will feel just a little bit harder for everyone involved that day.

It doesn't have to be that way, though.

My wife and I do something sometimes called "restarting the day." If we get off on the wrong foot, grumbling about not having time to get coffee before work or disagreeing about when to hand off the car, we can end up feeling resentful and alone. But if we take a minute, acknowledge that things aren't working, and decide to restart, we can end up leaving each other for the day with feelings of love and appreciation.

I have learned that this world is hard enough for all of us. There are ways to be kinder to the people I love. That's what God's grace has given to me, and that's what I can give to others. In Lent we prepare for a new life. It's as good a time as any to start practicing how to live a little more kindly, too.