

**Sunday, March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

**Lent 1**

**Luke 4:1-13**

<sup>1</sup>Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, <sup>2</sup>where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. <sup>3</sup>The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” <sup>4</sup>Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”

<sup>5</sup>Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. <sup>6</sup>And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. <sup>7</sup>If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” <sup>8</sup>Jesus answered him, “It is written,

‘Worship the Lord your God,  
and serve only him.’”

<sup>9</sup>Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, <sup>10</sup>for it is written,

‘He will command his angels concerning you,  
to protect you,’

<sup>11</sup>and

‘On their hands they will bear you up,  
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”

<sup>12</sup>Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” <sup>13</sup>When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

So...what’s your definition of wilderness? How do you envision “wilderness” in your world view? For me...lots of different images come mind. First, I think of the western movies of my childhood. Scenes from the desert southwest. Mountains in the background...a tumbleweed blowing through the scenery now and then. And dust...lots of dust. Hilly, rugged terrain where death always lurks. Nary a drop of water to be found in this desert scene. A John Ford movie with John Wayne as the central character.

Still another image I have of wilderness is one of a quiet place. A place apart...up high somewhere, like where Jesus would often go to pray. I think of places like the Sedona Mountains in Arizona. Serene...tall pine trees...a brook with running water in the background maybe. Snow high on the mountain tops maybe. At night, under the stars, you can hear the sound of the wind blowing through the tall pines.

Some of us may think of a desert as a real place, a place you may be in right now, facing hardship, failing health, uncertainty about your future. In this time of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, maybe we all feel like we're in some sort of desert place. But it's nothing compared to those who are living in that fear every day now. Fear, fear of the unknown, fear of death, fear of what tomorrow holds.

Fear may be as close as your own home, or other familiar place to you. Your workplace. Your church even. Now there's a really scary thought!

Regardless of what desert looks like for you...a real place on a map, or somewhere deep in your mind or soul, deserts can be dangerous places for us, because it's there where we feel alone, and vulnerable...frightened...scared.

It's in these places real or imagined where we face our own demons...just like Jesus does today in the gospel. And there's nothing, no one to protect him...or us. We're exposed for who we really are. No one to shelter us, to keep us from danger. No one to turn to to protect us

It's here that we find Jesus in our gospel story today, all alone in the desert. A place of danger for him. A place of confrontation with evil – with the devil himself, who's really crafty, and knows where Jesus might be most vulnerable. Food. Power. Things that tempt us all. A place were just like us, Jesus confronts his worst fears. It's in this place – a real place for Jesus, that he confronts his own temptation.

His hair's not even dry from having been baptized by John in the Jordan River, and already he's been led by Spirit to this desert place. For Jesus, just like for us at times, it's very real place. A very dangerous place...where he's left unprotected...exposed to the harsh realities of the desert...the world. The world in which we live.

And he's tempted, and taunted by Satan to do ungodly things. Things like worshiping power without limits, food without end, life without death

We all know these things...don't we? We all have tasted them in one way another. Tests that, if Jesus had complied, would have left him wildly popular, a ruler with power beyond imagination who would never die. He'd be worshiped like a true king, with all the trappings – armies, coins with his face carved on them. Wealth, power, more.

All of these are very tempting to Jesus, and even to us regular folks one way another, to a greater or lesser degree. But the cost, the cost to Jesus would have been his relationship

with God Father. The very relationship that gave him life the very relationship that had just claimed him own baptism.

The cost? Forcing him to trust in himself, in his own power when things got tough - surely steep price to pay for the Son of the Most High. All three synoptic gospel writers cover this account of Jesus in the desert, where he confronts the great accuser himself, Satan whose goal it is to sow seeds of doubt, mistrust, and fear in him.

I think one of the messages here is that evil in our lives doesn't always destroy us all at once, but instead, chips away at us, little by little, almost imperceptibly at times, so that it chips away at our very relationship with God, and lures us to rely on ourselves for help in times of trial. And we know that this never works out well for us, does it?

I think the gospel writers are trying to show us story today that temptation is very real. That walking alone deserts of our lives, whatever they look or feel like to you, can leave us vulnerable, forcing us to rely on our own strength.

And in doing this, evil becomes the force that draws us away from God. It's not necessarily someone in bodily form, although many of us know evil in that way. But instead, it's a force as real, and as powerful as if it were a real person tempting us...taunting us. And whatever, or whomever it looks like, we all know this is a very dangerous, and lonely place.

We are in the season of the forty days now, a time when Israel was tested in its wandering in the desert, apart from God.

We are in the season of the forty days now, a time when Moses, alone atop that mountain, waited for a word from God.

We are in season of the forty days, when Jesus himself was tempted, hungry...alone.

And we are in season of the forty days, when we ourselves face constant reminders of our own true identity. And that is of being totally dependent on God for our very being, and on God, who is our rock and our shield in times of trouble.

God, who knows the walk we walk, who has been where we are, who has faced his own trials, knows the dark places we've been in in our lives.

God, who knows us and calls us by name, and even in our own worst fears and trials, will never abandon or forsake, because he has been there, as many of us have.

As we enter into this 40 day Lenten journeys, staring at our own deserts, being tempted by whatever it is that pulls us away from God, may you know that each of us is a beloved child God called to life eternal in our baptism.

And may you know that nothing...not temptation...not false promises...not any bargaining with evil, not even death itself can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Nothing!

Because you have been marked with the cross of Christ, and sealed by the power the Holy Spirit in your baptism.

So let your light so shine before others that they see your good works, and thereby glorify your God in heaven, both now and forever.

So live your life in the light of Christ. Do good. Love God and neighbor, love yourself. Rejoice in the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in you. Amen.