

Sermon- 1st Sunday in Lent- February 18th, 2018

The Wilderness Journey

Grace and peace to you as we enter our Sundays in Lent. Churches throughout the country will begin with the Gospel story of Jesus in the wilderness. The temptation story - so familiar that we made a movie about it/ books about it/ The Last Temptation of Christ. We all know about being in the wilderness. We'll get to that in a few moments. First let's begin with Jesus.

Jesus has been baptized by John the Baptist. He comes out of the Jordan River and God speaks. "This is my Son, I am well pleased." WOW. It doesn't get any better than that. Better than a billboard - better than winning the super bowl - better than absolutely anything. Jesus was announced and highlighted by the biggest supporter of all - the big Guy - God. You would think that after that announcement, Jesus would get a little time to relish in the glory. Maybe a trip to Disney or a fancy dinner somewhere. Jesus should have gotten something.

Well he did, but not the usual accolades. He was given the Holy Spirit. Remember the Dove? Instead of the glory and cheering crowds and parties in His honor he was immediately swept into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to prepare himself for public ministry. 40 Days in the wilderness.

Forty is a very popular number in the scriptures. For 40 years the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness and tempted by everything. Noah was on the ark for 40 days and his faith was tested. Moses was on Mt Sinai for 40 Days - so long that people doubted he was alive. Elijah was on Mt Horab for 40 Days...the number keeps coming up. Apparently it takes 40 Days for big stuff to happen. Lent for 40 Days.

Jesus didn't go into the wilderness to listen to God - he heard God loud and clear at his Baptism. No. He went, actually he was driven there - not in a limo - but by the Holy Spirit. Why? To get ready for his ministry. Spring Training. Before the season starts.

We have been in a wilderness many times in our lives. We have been in places where we can't feel the presence of God. We pray, we fast, but nothing. We have been in tough places that feel like a wilderness journey.

Jesus has this experience. He spends days without food and the devil tempted him. Why was Jesus tempted? To show us that temptations are real - he experienced them because he knew that we would experience them. No one is exempt from the power of the tempter. The power of the devil. We are all vulnerable to temptation. The line in the Lord's Prayer takes on even more significance - "and lead us not into temptation." Jesus taught us to pray because he knew we would need it because he experienced it.

The text says he was tempted three times.

1. Tempted to turn stone into bread
2. Tempted to be all immune from problems - throw himself from the roof of the temple and let angels catch him in their arms.
3. Tempted to be all powerful- all he had to do was bow down and worship the devil and all the kingdoms of the world would be given to him.

So here we are. Tough choices. What would Jesus choose? What direction would his ministry take?

Jesus could have been the CEO of a bread manufacturing company. Could have been the Steve Jobs or Donald Trump of the 1st century. Could have been a celebrity making money off of a popular reality show. But thanks to the Holy Spirit, Jesus chose the way of his father in heaven.

Jesus chose to feed the hungry instead of himself

He chose to be the healer of the sick

He chose to cast out demons

He chose to be liberator of the oppressed

He chose to be a thorn in the side of religious authorities.

He chose the right path.

Well. What about us. What's it all about for you and me. We get that Jesus could beat the devil- after all He's God. We are not. We are Dennis or Bob or Mary. And we have our wilderness journey- our times in the desert- when we are vulnerable.

Have you ever been tempted? (Show of hands)

Have you ever felt sin really close to you? (Show of hands)

- Story of the church janitor painting the church steeple. Had only one gallon for the job- keeps adding a little water to the paint to finish the job. Adds a little more water. Finally finishes the job and a big rainstorm washes off all the new paint. A voice comes from heaven and says “repaint and thin no more.” (Repent and sin no more).

Yes sin and temptation are all around us. Lent is our spring training. And we need to remember that God’s Spirit is with us. Walking with us- Emmanuel. We can journey into the deserts of our lives knowing that God walks with us. He meets us in the midst of our pain and suffering, in the midst of our sin and temptation and offers a word of peace, a word of hope and forgiveness.

Even in those places where the wild things are, the desert lands where the battles of life still rage, the battles against poverty and sick children, the battles against cancer and broken families, the battles against anger and war, the battles against domestic violence and Alzheimer’s, the battles against alcohol and addiction, yes in those places Jesus Christ walks with us and when we can’t walk on our own, he carries us.

Lent is our Spring Training but the coach walks with us. We are not alone.

Amen- let it be so.