

Sermon- Our Saviors Lutheran Church- March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019  
1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent – Text- Luke 4:1-13

Traversing the Wilderness

Grace and Peace to you and from our Lord Jesus Christ. Here we are, The first Sunday in Lent and we begin with the Gospel account of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Only two of our Gospels give the long version of the account. John leaves it out altogether and Mark covers the whole thing with just a few words: the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness, he was there 40 Days, Satan tempted him, wild beasts kept him company, and angels waited on him.

Our text today goes into much greater detail. Every time the devil offered him more- more bread, more power, more protection- Jesus turned him down. No to the bread, no to the kingdoms, no to the angelic bodyguards.

Since you, no doubt, have heard a ton of sermons about what Jesus and the Devil said to each other, I will skip that part. Especially since none of us will get this same test. When it is our turn, none of us will get the Son of God test. We will probably get the regular old Adam and Eve test which means that the devil has to only offer us an all you can eat buffet or some extra cash to turn our heads.

Instead, I want to focus on the wilderness. Maybe you are familiar with a wilderness area. Are you? (Pastor asks the congregation). My wilderness area that I am most familiar with is The Adirondack State Park. Located in Upstate New York. It beautiful but quite primal at the same time. You could definitely get lost in it. It is 6 million acres. Has 3,000 lakes and is bigger than five states, NH, NJ, Connecticut, Delaware, and Rhode Island. I go there to a small section of it every August when I visit Saratoga Race Track to watch phenomenal thoroughbreds run around a track. Certainly a huge untamed wilderness area.

But maybe for our purposes today, we should focus on a different kind of wilderness area. The wilderness areas of life where we often find ourselves. Not in the woods somewhere, but in situations where we feel a spiritual wilderness. If we focus on that kind of wilderness I have a feeling that we have been there many times. Maybe it looked like a hospital room, or a doctor's office waiting for the results of a biopsy, or maybe it looked like the parking lot where you couldn't

find your car on the day you lost your job. Those situations remind us of how tough these wilderness areas are.

Maybe we need to see what helped Jesus. Kind of interesting. The spirit of God drove him into the wilderness and the spirit of God sustained him in the wilderness. What the spirit did for Jesus is that it “freed” him. It freed him to focus on what was important. It helps him form a purpose in his life. The same spirit is there for us when we feel like we are in a wilderness.

And that is exactly what Lent is for. Lent- from an English word meaning “spring”- not just a reference to the crocuses pushing their ways out of the ground in the season before Easter, but also to the greening of the human soul- pruned with repentance, fertilized with fasting, spritzed with self-appraisal, mulched with prayer. Lent- a wonderful time for getting closer to God even though the world out there seems to think it has something to do with what we “give up”. Very silly.

A cute story:

An Irishman moves into a tiny hamlet in County Kerry, walks into a pub and orders three beers. The bartender raises his eyebrows, but serves the man three beers, which he drinks quietly at a table, alone. An hour later, the man has finished the three beers and orders three more.

This happens yet again. The next evening the same scene is repeated. And each evening after that. Soon the town is calling him “man who orders three beers.”

Finally the bartender inquires why three beers at a time. The guy says that he has two brothers. One in the USA; the other in Australia. ‘We promised each other that we would always order an extra two beers whenever we drank as a way of keeping up the family bond.’ The whole town was pleased with the answer and the guy becomes a town celebrity.

Then one day the guy comes in and orders two beers. The bartender is sad and the evening continues two beers at a time. Prayers are offered around the time for the soul of one of his brothers. The bartender speaks to the man and offers condolences. The man responds, “You’ll be happy to know that my two brothers are alive and well... it’s just that I, myself, have decided to give up drinking for Lent.”

That's about how crazy and almost non-sensical if that is our focus for Lent. No, our focus has to be something different. It has to be a realization that Lent is an opportunity to get closer to God, much like Jesus did in his wilderness journey. To do some spring training. Focus on Prayer, Fasting, Giving to others.

Commercial Message\*\*\* How to get closer? Bible studies on Sundays at 9:15am, Soup suppers on Wednesday at 5:30 and worship at 6:30. That is, unless you have no need to get closer to God!

We need Lent to remind ourselves of a few things.

Often we WILL be in a wilderness.

We WILL need God's Spirit.

We WILL have it.

Why? Because he promised.

We are not alone in the wilderness. We need to use Lent as a way to get closer to God, feel that spirit and trust the spirit that leads us out again and again, ready to worship the Lord your God and serve no other all the days of your life.

Amen. Let it be so!