

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, March 6, 2022

Text: Luke 4

“God of our parched places”

I had this brilliant idea over the weekend of running my first 5K in several years... without training. It was a fundraiser for the Neenah track team. Shortly into the race I was breathing heavy... but kept going. Then I saw this flag that said in giant letters ‘1 mile’. I was tempted to start walking there. Two more miles seemed like an eternity at that point. But I never stopped and finished in 30 minutes. Staying the course made me feel good, even though I wanted to quit.

In our Gospel for today, Luke tells us that...

<sup>1</sup>Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the **wilderness**.

Did you catch that, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness <sup>2</sup>where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. Why would the Spirit do this? We know that Jesus' experienced testing of his divinity and humanity in the wilderness that will prepare him for the rest of his life and ministry. If you read a little further, Jesus emerged from the wilderness stronger... in the power of the Spirit.

The wilderness in the Bible wasn't a jungle with lush green trees, water, and an abundance of food. The wilderness in the Bible was like a desert. It is sometimes described as a parched place, a lonely place, a barren place. This is where Jesus finds himself after his baptism.

For starters, our faith and baptism in Jesus Christ don't guarantee us an easy or worry-free life. We will no doubt face many challenges and temptations in our lives... and we will fail time and time again. I feel some people think that Christians have it easier and suffer less. Not true. But when we do suffer, we get to suffer with hope... and in a God who walks with us in our suffering. Our faith and baptism guarantee that God will be with us in our wilderness times, give us the tools to counter the attacks of the devil, and will lead us to life and salvation.

Can you relate to having wilderness times in your life? Times of the unknown? Times of feeling parched? Times when your faith is tested? Maybe you are in a wilderness time right now? When we experience a loss. When we are forced to move from something familiar to the unfamiliar. Think of all the refugees fleeing Ukraine and Russia. When you watch the news it puts us in a wilderness.

I feel these past few years have been like a wilderness that left many of us forced to make decisions between being safe during Covid and longing for ways to be in community. None of us has navigated Covid perfectly. But we are here today... many of us appearing with our scars from the past two years where 6 million people worldwide have died with complications from Covid.

However, there is something comforting to me to know that Jesus faced worldly temptations by the devil, like we do, and overcame them.

Debi Thomas in her weekly blog on the lectionary texts, Journey with Jesus, wonders if these temptations of Jesus might become invitations for us — invitations to trust God's love in the barren places of our lives. Because it's one thing to trust God in retrospect, when our hardships are over. It is quite another to trust God in the moment, when the comforts and certainties we cling to burn to ash.

The first temptation of Jesus came when Jesus was alone and hungry. The devil attacks when we are alone and don't have a community surrounding us. Devil in the original Greek language of the New Testament is Diabolos. Diabolical. Luke says after 40 days of fasting, Jesus was famished. The devil tempted Jesus to turn stones to bread. Jesus countered with scripture. Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Deuteronomy 8:

The next temptation was world domination. This temptation still exists... playing out right now in Ukraine. The devil tried convincing Jesus that he owned everything and it was his to give to Jesus if he bowed down and worshipped him. Jesus knew everything belongs to God. Again, Jesus countered with scripture.

‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’ Deut 6:13.

The third temptation was even more diabolical. The Devil used scripture against Jesus. The devil tried to quote Psalm 91... for Jesus to throw himself off the pinnacle of the temple so angels would come and swoop him lest he doesn't dash his foot against a stone. Psalm 91 inspired the song, Eagle's Wings, and was given to soldiers as they headed off to war. Jesus again countered this temptation with scripture, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Our faith and baptism matter. Jesus used his faith and scripture to preserve him and protect him from the wiles of the devil. Also know that there was a hierarchy in scripture. Jesus has power over the devil and evil in the Bible. Evil spirits always shirked at Jesus' presence and begged him to leave them alone.

Siblings in Christ, You will be tempted. You will succumb to those temptations. And if you overcome one temptation, there is another one waiting for you around the corner. That is where the cross of Jesus comes in. There is grace for you. There are new beginnings. There is forgiveness. Other than our faith, what other means do you have to overcome temptation? Your own Will power? I don't know about you, but I have very little trust in my own ability to overcome temptation without the help of God and my faith.

Thanks be to God that we have Jesus Christ, who was fully human and fully divine. He knew the power of temptation and the wilderness. He overcame temptations with scripture and his trust in God the Father. We too have scripture. We have the sacraments of baptism and communion. We have the promises of our faith and forgiveness.

Thanks be to God. Amen.