

## **Into the Wilderness**

**Lent # 1**

**March 10, 2019**

Today is the day that we FINALLY get to talk about Jesus' experience in the wilderness. If you remember, chronologically this happens right after Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan. But in the church year, when we are following the lectionary, on the Sunday following the celebrations of Jesus' birth and the visit of the wise men we remember Jesus' baptism and we skip over the temptation in the wilderness; saving it for the first Sunday of Lent.

While I understand the connection between the season of Lent and Jesus' time in the wilderness- the reminder of Jesus' humanity as seen in his fasting and the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness that parallel the 40 days between Ash Wednesday and Easter- it is also a shame that the accounts of Jesus' baptism and his temptation aren't considered on consecutive Sundays. Jesus' baptism and his temptation are just as connected, perhaps even more so.

When Jesus was baptized, the heavens opened up and a voice spoke: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Now whether or not anyone, other than Jesus, who was there at the Jordan heard that voice, we hear it. And we know that Jesus has been identified and claimed as God's beloved.

Following God's pronouncement, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where, for forty days and for forty nights he fasted and was tempted by the devil. At the end of the forty days, Jesus is tested, he is tempted, three different times and as he resists each attempt, the devil tries again with bigger "rewards" to get Jesus to give in.

Two of the temptations that Jesus faced were prefaced with "If you are the Son of God..." These statements are linked back to Jesus' baptism when God declares

Jesus to be the beloved Son. The devil is testing the validity of this declaration almost immediately.. And with the other temptation the devil tries to have Jesus fall down and worship him. Because Jesus is the Son of God, Jesus is able to withstand the fasting and each of the temptations - Jesus rises above them.

Jesus is able to rise above the temptations that the devil places before him because he knows who he is. He knows that he is the Son of God. He knows that God is pleased with him, that God accepts him for who he is and that God is blessed by what he does. The temptations that Jesus faces are all about his identity, they are about challenging who he was and what he was being called to do. Jesus is tempted to deny his identity as the beloved Son of God and to do things on his own.

The three temptations are all about three basic desires of human existence-satisfying physical needs, obtaining power, and maintaining safety. When the devil challenges Jesus to turn the stones into bread, he is telling him that HE (Jesus) is responsible for meeting his own physical needs. When the devil challenges Jesus by offering to him all the kingdoms of the world, he is telling him that he can have and be everything that the world sees as important. And when the devil places Jesus at the pinnacle of the Temple and tells him to throw himself down and rely on God to send his angels to protect him, he is telling him to prove that God loves him and will protect him.

Jesus, in resisting all these temptations placed before him, is proving that he knows who he is and that he is going to continue to do what God has called him to do as his beloved son. Jesus is telling the devil that he doesn't need what the devil can give, that he won't be who the devil wants him to be, because he has God.

When the devil challenges him to satisfy his hunger (and remember that Jesus had been fasting for 40 days and nights) by turning the stones into bread, Jesus says "I don't need your bread because I have God" We face the same temptation every time

that we rely on ourselves to meet our own physical needs rather than relying on God to meet them for us. We need to say what Jesus said “I don’t need your bread because I have God. He meets my physical needs.”

When the devil challenges Jesus by offering him power over all the kingdoms of the world, Jesus responds by saying, “I don’t need your power because I have God.” God gives us that same power. We don’t need to power that the devil gives because we have the power that God gives. And the power that God gives us is greater than any power that the world offers to us. It is the power of love over hate, of forgiveness over punishment, of grace over sin, of life over death. We have that power, but too often we fail to call on that power and we choose death over life, sin over grace, punishment over forgiveness, and hate over love.

When the devil challenges Jesus by asking him to prove that God will protect him by sending angels to bear him up, Jesus responds by saying “I don’t need to prove to you that I have God’s protection because God has already proven it to me.” We have God’s ultimate protection of life over death that Jesus provides for us in his death and resurrection.

Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness was what he needed in order to claim the truth of his identity as the Beloved Son of God that God proclaimed when he was baptized. And it is what we need in order to claim our identity as God’s beloved children as well. Knowing that Jesus was able to resist those temptations to satisfy his physical needs, to obtain power, to maintain safety is what we need because we will be tempted by those very same things over and over and over again.

What lies under the surface of all those temptations is the ultimate temptation to rely on ourselves rather than on God, to think that we can all of those things, to think that we can do everything better than God can do it. It is the temptation to make gods of ourselves, to live as if we are God.

As we enter into the wilderness, whether it be the metaphorical wilderness signified by this season of Lent or a wilderness in our professional or personal lives, we will face the temptation to try to emerge from the wilderness by relying on ourselves rather than relying on God. We will face the temptation to forget our identity as God's beloved. And we can't let that happen.

We can't allow ourselves to live on bread alone, we must live on the love of God for it is just as sustaining and just as essential as any food we eat. We need to satisfy our spiritual needs along with our physical needs. We can't seek our own power and desire the world to bow down before us and worship us. We need to submit to God's power and bring the world to bow down and worship God. We can't provide our own protection, we can't test God. We need to rely on the fact that God has already given us the ultimate protection.

Today, as we begin the season of Lent, we come to the table and we receive the body and the blood of Christ. Let us remember that it is broken and shed for us- to satisfy our needs, our wants, and our desires. Jesus died that we might live. So let us live not with fear but let us live with love. Let us live with the love that God gives to us, with the love that is seen in these gifts of bread and cup, of body and blood. Let us live with the love that call us to give ourselves for God and to each other. Let us live as we truly are, let us live as God's beloved children and let us love each other as God loves us.

Amen