

Sermon for March 6, 2022

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Today we hear the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. This is always the story for the first Sunday of Lent as we begin our 40 day journey towards the cross. In today's text, Jesus spends 40 days, over a month, in the wilderness away from his community, being tempted by the devil -the forces that rebel against God

Let's take a quick look at the specific temptations.

Right away the first temptation reminds us of Jesus' humanity. "He ate nothing at all during those days...he was famished." Jesus knew hunger and the weakness and pain that came without having food to sustain. The first temptation comes amidst his human hunger- "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." How is this temptation a force that works against God? The temptation is for Jesus to provide for oneself, to strive to fill one's own need, to fill one's hunger with earthly bread alone, versus trust God's promise to sustain. Jesus responds quoting scripture from the story in which God provided manna for the Israelites in the wilderness, "One does not live by bread alone." We are tempted and strive to fill our deep hunger with earthly provisions. Will we trust and rely on God?

For the second temptation, Jesus is led up to a high vantage point and shown a view of all the "kingdoms of the world." If Jesus will worship the forces the deny and work against God, he is promised power and glory over all the kingdoms. The temptation - to worship that which is not God. The temptation - to seek power, to use one's power for self-gain instead of obedience to God. Do we seek power for self-gain? How do we use the power we have? What do we worship? Jesus responds "Worship the Lord your God and serve only him."

The third temptation takes place in Jerusalem, at the height of the temple. The temptation to test God and God's promises. If you throw yourself into a life threatening scenario will God send his angels to protect and save as has been written? The temptation – to desire proof. The struggle – to live by faith. Jesus responds "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

With that the scripture reads "the devil departed from him until an opportune time." While this account of temptation and Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness ends, the forces that rebel against God remain ever active, waiting for the opportune time. Jesus' responses to temptation refuse easier paths. The way of faithfulness is not easier. Jesus chooses a way of suffering and sacrifice. The temptations to rely on self, to fill our hunger with earthly things, to strive for power, to use our power for personal gain, to worship what is not God, to test, to long for proof, to choose easier paths remain human temptations. As theologian Caroline Lewis states "Obedience to God is not a given. It is not automatic, even for Jesus. It is hard work. What anchors us? What practices support us?"

Jesus does four things that can encourage us in our humanity, as we encounter temptations that work against God.

Directly before the temptation Luke tells us of Jesus' baptism. In the text Jesus is praying and a voice from heaven says "You are my Son the beloved." The gospel of Luke then gives us a 15 verse genealogy that traces Jesus' ancestry throughout all time back to the creation of Adam, who was dust of the ground until God breathed into him the breath of life. Jesus prays and is reminded and rooted in his identity as Son of God, beloved of the Creator of the universe. In the first temptation the devil tempts "IF you are the Son of God..." But Jesus knows who he is. "You are my Son, the beloved." We too have been given an identity as created and beloved children of God. How different may we respond to temptation if we in prayer have been reminded and rooted in this truth? Instead of "IF," "SINCE I am a child of God..."

The first line of the wilderness temptation begins "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit." It is not by Jesus' power alone but rather through the power of the Holy Spirit that he encounters the powers that work against God. We are baptized in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. The baptized are prayed over "sustain them with the gift of your Holy Spirit." We do not face the forces that rebel against God alone. You too are "full of the Holy Spirit."

Notice how Jesus responds to each of the temptations. Not with argument but simply with words from scripture. Jesus' responses are deeply rooted in the word of God. When facing wilderness times, temptation and struggle, do we have the word of God deeply planted within us to sustain us and guide our response?

Finally, after the wilderness temptations, with the knowledge that the forces that rebel against God remain ever present, Jesus leaves the wilderness and seeks out disciples as companions for the journey. Even Jesus does not ultimately do the journey alone.

Rooted in his identity as Son of God, full of the Holy Spirit, grounded in scripture, part of community – Jesus begins his ministry and journey to the cross. Rooted in our identity as children of God, full of the Holy Spirit, gifted with the word of God, gathered into community we continue the work of ministry, our earthly journey.

Around a dozen years ago, I had a very tangible experience of these four practices in a wilderness time. Brayden, our son, was just under 2 years old. Playing on the living room floor, our toddler suddenly let out a blood curdling shriek and collapsed trembling into my arms. After a few moments he recovered, only to repeat the pattern every 15 minutes with increased intensity. Panicked Jason and I raced him to the ER where we learned he had a rare condition in which his small intestine had telescoped into his large intestine. It was fatal if not treated immediately but Duluth did not have a pediatric surgeon to perform this technique and the helicopter would most likely not be able to reach the Cities in time. In the brief span of time that followed I was frantic for human provision, for power – connections, money, whatever would promise life, to worship whatever would save my son, to force God's hand into proving God's promise that he would provide and save.

But as we waited as a specialist from the Cities talked a Duluth doctor through a first time procedure over the phone, there was a shift in me. As scared as I was I felt the roots of our identity - Since I am a child of God...Since Brayden is a child of God... I had this tangible sense of the Holy Spirit with me, with Brayden. I did not know if Brayden would survive - that was not God's promise but the scripture words of Romans 8:38 played like a broken record in my head "Nothing - neither life, nor death - can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Nothing can separate Brayden from the love of God. Nothing can separate me from the love of God." And then Pastor Jerome showed up – in the days that followed Trinity showed up in prayer, in presence – gathered into community we do not do this journey alone.

We pray – Jesus root us in our identity as children of God, fill us once again with your Spirit, ground us in your Word, gather us in community. For we journey in wilderness, we are tempted, the forces that rebel against you are many. Teach us your ways.