

So we have entered the season of Lent; period of time before Easter when we intentionally focus on our need for the death and resurrection of Jesus. A time beginning with Ash Wednesday this past Wed. when we recognize that the life and things of this world are temporary and do come to an end and that it is only our hope in the resurrected Jesus that shapes what is beyond this temporary life. This is a time that is meant to be a spiritual journey and reflection. And as many of you already know, Lent is 40 days before Easter, not including Sundays. And that idea of 40 days comes from the passage we are going to look at this morning where Jesus is tempted for 40 days in the wilderness. Jesus takes a 40-day journey and now so do we. So let's look at one of the accounts of Jesus being tested in the wilderness, this one from Luke chapter 4.

Luke 4:1-13

**4** Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, <sup>2</sup> where for forty days he was tempted<sup>[a]</sup> by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

<sup>3</sup> The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

<sup>4</sup> Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'<sup>[b]</sup>"

<sup>5</sup> The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. <sup>6</sup> And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. <sup>7</sup> If you worship me, it will all be yours."

<sup>8</sup> Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'<sup>[c]</sup>"

<sup>9</sup> The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. <sup>10</sup> For it is written:

"He will command his angels concerning you  
to guard you carefully;

<sup>11</sup> they will lift you up in their hands,  
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'<sup>[d]</sup>"

<sup>10.\|2</sup> Jesus answered, "It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'<sup>[e]</sup>"

<sup>13</sup> When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

So Jesus is led by the Spirit into the desert for 40 days of fasting. Now you may be thinking that the interval of 40 days is something you have heard before. And indeed you are right. The number 40 shows up multiple times in the Bible. Moses is up on Mount Sinai for 40 days with God. Elijah wanders in the desert with the Spirit of God for 40 days. And probably the most significant wandering that would have been on Jesus' mind would be the wandering of the people of Israel in the wilderness for 40 years. Jesus' coming is really the fulfillment of what

God began with the people of Israel over a thousand years prior. So how fitting that Jesus now wanders. There is this recurring wandering in the wilderness for this set amount of time to learn something from God. To walk with the Spirit of God. And apparently it is so important that even Jesus has to do it.

Have you ever felt like you were wandering in the wilderness spiritually? I know that in these cases I have just cited people actually wandered physically in the wilderness, but I think there is a spiritual wilderness as well. A place that is not comfortable. A place that feels desolate. A place where you do not know your way. I know I have felt that way spiritually before. I am guessing many of us have experienced this unsettling wilderness in our minds and souls. But the recurrence of this tells us that this is part of the Christian life. This is part of getting to know God. Sometimes we have to be lost and let God find us or lead us. It is uncomfortable for sure, but perhaps necessary.

But notice at the beginning of this passage it says that Jesus was full of the Spirit and that the Spirit led him into the wilderness. Now wait a minute. In this passage I have always known that Satan was the tempter. Satan is the bad guy. For me this passage used to be mostly about the interaction between Jesus and Satan, which we will get to in a moment. But verse 1 says that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. God initiates this whole scenario. This means that the Spirit may lead us places we do not want to go. This does not fit the comforting image that I prefer to have of the Holy Spirit. In John chapter 14 Jesus comforts the disciples that when Jesus leaves them he will send the Holy Spirit to be with them. That is comforting and we want that kind of Holy Spirit. But I think we need to recognize that the Holy Spirit is here to be an advocate for God, that is what John chapters 14 and 16 say. The Spirit is an advocate. An advocate will teach us. So it is possible that the Spirit leads us places that are uncomfortable. That we would rather avoid. Places of wilderness in which we do not want to go, but may need to go.

And just as we start to grow concerned that God would lead us into such places, we can also see that we do not wander alone. God's Spirit is with us even when we wander someplace uncomfortable and perhaps even feel lost. This wandering in the wilderness by Jesus is supervised by God. And indeed in all of those other wanderings that I mentioned, the wanderings of Moses and Elijah and the people of Israel, God was there. God led and supervised. They needed to wander and be uncomfortable in order for God to be able to teach them. I think we need to wander in these ways from time to time as well. I mean think about it, we are very comfortable people aren't we? We have homes and heat and AC and cars with heat and AC. We have food, we have remote controls for our TVs. We have smart phones that allow us to look up anything. We have fast food, washers and dryers, sofas, beds, and the list goes on. And I think if we are too comfortable, we can't hear what God is trying to teach us because comfortable becomes a god. Sometimes we need to be moved out of our comfort zones

to hear the Spirit of God. So these wanderings in the wilderness, not only are we led there by God, but we need to go there sometimes and God goes with us.

So, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to fast and wander for 40 days, and Satan takes this as an opportunity to tempt Jesus. Now our culture generally does not take Satan seriously. In a 2016 statistics poll 79% of Americans thought God was real, but only 61% thought Satan was real. We tend to believe in the reality of God more than in the reality of the devil. And this is dangerous because if we do not think Satan is a reality, then our guard for his temptations is down. And Satan knows how to appeal to our weaknesses. This is something that these three temptations or testings of Jesus show us.

In the first one, beginning in verse 2 it says that Jesus was fasting and he was very hungry. So what does Satan tempt him with first? Food. Bread, the most basic food in the Bible. He says “turn that stone into bread.” And notice how Satan does this. He first questions Jesus’ power. He says “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.” Now, Jesus is hungry. He is the Son of God. He does have the power to turn that stone into bread. Why not just do it? What would have been wrong with that? The problem with this temptation is that Satan is not just challenging Jesus’ power, he is challenging Jesus to use his power to act independently of God. Satan is basically saying “hey Jesus, why has God left you out here hungry? Why not use your power to take care of it?” It is a temptation to not rely on God and God’s plan, and this is a basic temptation that we all face. To not rely on God and God’s plan, but rather try to act on our own power.

And this is nothing new. This is the same Satan and temptation from creation in Genesis. What did Satan tempt Adam and Eve with? Regarding the tree of knowledge of good and evil? He says surely you will not die, but you will know as much as God. In other words, you can do this. You don’t need God for this. This is the same Satan. This is the same temptation. Nothing has changed from Adam to Jesus. Satan is still trying to send the same wrong message. The temptation that “you’ve got this. You don’t need to rely on God.” It is a temptation that we face every day. And even Jesus is not exempt.

The next temptation is to worship Satan. Starting in verse 5 this says “The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, “I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours.” Now why would this be a temptation for Jesus? Jesus is already the Son of God. He already has all the power in the world. Why worship Satan for power? Well, being the Son of God and being obedient to God means Jesus will have to die on the cross. Jesus knows this. So the temptation here is to avoid the hardship coming his way. The message is your life will be easier if you go with Satan’s plan. That is the temptation. And of course it is a lie. Think of all of the shortcuts you could take in this life that would not be a benefit in the end. Here is a really mundane example: I hate getting

maintenance done my car. I don't want to have to schedule a day when it is in the shop and have to arrange rides with my husband to shuttle back and forth. You all know this annoyance right? But if I don't maintenance my car eventually what happens? The car stops working, right? The shortcut does not work in the end. Now a more serious example. Think about substance abuse. It is often used to avoid tough things in life, avoiding tough emotions or dealing with stress. It can seem to make all that easier. But in the end it is not easier. In the end an addiction becomes one of the worst battles one can have in life. Satan loves to offer shortcuts. But they won't end well.

And then there is the third temptation where Satan leads Jesus to this really high peak and tempts him to test God and jump. Yes, the temptation of suicide is in the Bible. Wow, pretty important message for those tempted today and think they are alone. This is not new....many face this temptation. And here Satan ups his tactics. Jesus has been responding to each temptation by quoting scripture. So for this third temptation Satan quotes scripture. He makes it sound right. Satan misuses scripture to make it sound like the right thing to do. This is how sneaky Satan can be.

(Joke) You know there was a couple and they were struggling to make ends meet after building their dream home. And one day they went shopping, the man went to the men's clothing section and wife to the women's section. A little later the wife came back with a bag and receipt for thousands of dollars that she spent on this beautiful Indian saree. And the husband says "How could you do this?!" And she explained "I was outside the store looking at the dress in the window, and then I found myself trying it on. It was like Satan was whispering in my ear, 'You look fabulous in that dress. Buy it!'" "Well," the husband replied, "You know how I deal with that kind of temptation. I would say, 'Get behind me, Satan!'" And the wife answered "I did," but then Satan said, "It looks fabulous from back here, too!" Satan will make temptations sound right when they are not.

So, we have these three temptations and Jesus answers each of them with scripture. This certainly highlights the importance of our knowing scripture. Knowing what God says so that when we hear what Satan says, we know how to respond. Of course, the reality for most of us is that we do not have scripture memorized the way Jesus did. We have not been raised in a good Jewish home where we have taught the memorization of scripture by wrote like Jesus would have as a child and then trained as a rabbi. However, I don't think God has unreasonable expectations of us. God knows us. God knows we can go to scripture and consult it when we are not sure of what to do. The Word of God is here for us. Should we spend as much time in it as possible? Of course. But when we don't know the answer to something, we can go to God's Word and learn about God's character and how God would want us to respond to temptations and circumstances and challenges.

Now I know the way Luke has recorded this passage makes this testing of Jesus between him and the devil sound like a conversation. And of course for Luke to have recorded this, Jesus must have told them about this encounter while he was in the wilderness. And this encounter is recorded in Mark and Matthew as well. So we know that Jesus told them about this and taught them by sharing it. And it would have sounded like a conversation as Jesus shared it. But I don't think this encounter was a real person to person conversation. I don't think the devil was physically standing there in front of Jesus in the desert in his red tights and pitch fork in hand. I think this was like any temptation from the devil. I think these messages came to Jesus in his thoughts as he wandered. I think as he got hungry the thought "I am the Son of God, I have power, I could just turn that stone into bread and eat it, even though I know that is not what I am supposed to do right now." I think Jesus was tempted in the same ways that we are tempted. The thoughts that come to our minds that we know are probably not God's will and then we wrestle with them. This is how Satan works in our minds and hearts. And I don't have reason to think it was any different for Jesus.

At the end of this passage in verse 13 it says "When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time." Until an opportune time. Jesus is not done being tempted. Satan is not done with the Son of God yet. When would that opportune time be? Perhaps in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus would have those very human emotions and ask if it is possible for the burden of going to the cross be lifted? Or would it be on the cross? When the sin of the world is on the Son of God and he cries out "my God my God, why have you forsaken me?" I think that is the opportune time mentioned here. When Jesus' suffering is at its greatest, I think that is when Satan shows up again. I think Satan loves to tempt us when we suffer. It is the most powerful time for Satan to move in and tempt us to doubt a loving God.

You know we are continuing through this month with the bereavement group called griefshare. And in this group we have noted all of the doubts and fears Satan can send our way when we loose a loved one. All very common things we encounter in grief. Things like "I am angry at God for taking my loved one," or "how could God let this happen," or "God let me down." These are the common temptations used on us when we suffer grief. And although they are normal reactions and it is OK to have them and admit them, the next step is working through them and coming to know the God of love again. And that is a spiritual journey, much like the ones Moses took, Elijah took, and Jesus took.

So what is your journey for this 40 days leading to Easter? Where do you need to be led by the Spirit? Is grief like what I just mentioned the spiritual journey that you are on right now? Or, are you being tempted in any of the ways I mentioned Jesus was tempted? Are you tempted to not rely on God and God's plan? Are you tempted to follow the easier path? Are you tempted to question God? If there is one thing that is clear in all of these cases, Satan will tempt you to take spiritual shortcuts while you wander and I can assure you, there are no spiritual shortcuts.

The spiritual journey with the Spirit of God has to follow God's plan and it has to be unique to you and your relationship with God. And it will be challenging at times. Sometimes we have to go into the wilderness to hear God's voice. But if you think you have found a shortcut, I ask you, please don't take it. If things are challenging and you think buying something nice like a new car will just make you feel better, don't do it. Nice expensive things cannot fill spiritual gaps. Food cannot fill spiritual gaps. Drugs cannot fill spiritual gaps. Entertainment cannot fill spiritual gaps. All of these things have their place. But they cannot be used as spiritual shortcuts. There are no spiritual shortcuts in the journey with God. So let the Spirit of God lead you where it will. Walk with the Spirit and trust the God that supervises the journey. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, amen.