

Sermon March 9, 2025

Luke 4:1-13 (the Message)

Tested by the Devil

Now Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wild. For forty wilderness days and nights he was tested by the Devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when the time was up he was hungry.

The Devil, playing on his hunger, gave the first test: "Since you're God's Son, command this stone to turn into a loaf of bread."

Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy: "It takes more than bread to really live."

For the second test he led him up and spread out all the kingdoms of the earth on display at once. Then the Devil said, "They're yours in all their splendor to serve your pleasure. I'm in charge of them all and can turn them over to whomever I wish. Worship me and they're yours, the whole works."

Jesus refused, again backing his refusal with Deuteronomy: "Worship the Lord your God and only the Lord your God. Serve him with absolute single-heartedness."

For the third test the Devil took him to Jerusalem and put him on top of the Temple. He said, "If you are God's Son, jump. It's written, isn't it, that 'he has placed you in the care of angels to protect you; they will catch you; you won't so much as stub your toe on a stone'?"

"Yes," said Jesus, "and it's also written, 'Don't you dare tempt the Lord your God.'"

That completed the testing. The Devil retreated temporarily, lying in wait for another opportunity.

Third Reading

Revelations of Love Chapters 15 by Julian of Norwich (14th century mystic)

Beloved, let us love one another because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten of God and has knowledge of God. Those who do not love have known nothing of God, for God is love. God's love was revealed in our midst in this way: by sending the Only Begotten into the world, that we might have faith through the Anointed One.

No one has ever seen God. Yet if we love one another, God dwells in us, and God's love is brought to perfection in us.

Prayer

"God, of your goodness, give me yourself; you are enough for me, and anything less that I could ask for would not do you full honour. And if I ask anything that is less, I shall always lack something, but in you alone I have everything."

Dwelling in the Shelter of God's Love

As Jesus rose from the waters of baptism, he hit the road and headed straight for the wilderness. He faced temptations in that God-forsaken place that he needed to overcome, so that he could take on the mantle of his ministry. Jesus's temptation in the wilderness tells us about our human relationship with God, that we are not alone in the world and are not alone to face the troubles and fears and heartbreaks and temptations of the world on our own. We are not alone now and we never will be. Sometimes we enter into frightening or dark places and we feel so alone. We struggle to trust the truth that God's love and presence with us is real. That is what the story of the wilderness is all about.

We all walk through the wilderness at one time or another.

And maybe that's what brings you to this place, a place filled with wilderness companions who are seeking the shelter of God's love.

We come to hear the stories. We come to be reminded of how God led the people through the waters and through the wilderness to the promised land. We come to hear how the people respond with gratitude with the first fruits. We come to hear how Paul spread the good news to new people... people like us. And we come to hear how Jesus' own wilderness experiences prepared him for his calling... just as God prepares each of us today.

This place is especially important when the outside world is chaotic and cruel. Julian of Norwich wrote "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well." She lived in a time of turmoil: Black Death killed entire villages and a series of Peasant Revolts left people feeling vulnerable and frightened. Yet her theology was optimistic, speaking of God's love in terms of joy and compassion as opposed to law and duty. She believed that God loved and wanted to save everyone. Popular theology of that time, magnified by the horrendous current events, said that God was punishing the wicked. In response, Julian suggested a more merciful theology. She believed that behind the reality of hell is a greater mystery of God's love. She had a vision of Jesus who told her that "sin is necessary but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well."

We come to this place seeking wellness and healing and true sanctuary. Trinity truly is a "Dwelling of God's Sheltering Love", as Julian of Norwich would say. A place that has a strong heritage that we want to pass on for generations to come. As we move forward as a community, there are some important lessons in leadership and vision in our scriptures that can inform us.

I've been thinking a lot about this recently, especially the different kinds of leadership styles and what it means for us... specifically the different ways that Moses and Jesus led the people.

The gift of these first fruits were important because the people had so much to be grateful for. After 200 years in Egypt... after generations of being enslaved... God called Moses to lead the people to freedom. It wasn't the life he envisioned for himself, but he took his staff and agreed to lead the people. It wasn't easy. It took longer than anyone thought it would, including Moses. The people found themselves stranded in the wilderness because they kept struggling against God's vision for them. They followed Moses... they made Moses their leader... they saw Moses as someone called by God. But yet... they doubted. Over and over again, they get angry at their circumstances, they doubt, Moses' leadership, they tried to circumvent his leadership or talked behind his back. They even threatened to try and get rid of him. But few tried to work with him or learn from him. It was Moses in the front, and everyone else behind.

But as the people struggled and fought, each time, God intervenes, saves them, and thrusts them deeper into the wilderness to figure it out. And over and over again, the only way out is to follow Moses... and God.

I wonder if Jesus thought about that wilderness experience as he spent his own time in the wilderness. He was thrust deep into the darkness too, but he had the lessons learned to take with him. And he did something, that Moses and his followers never did. And this is the piece that I've been thinking about.

One of the first things Jesus did when he emerged from the wilderness was to form a leadership group – we call them disciples. He taught them and trained them. And then, he expanded his group. In a few weeks we will hear about the day when he sends out – not the 12—but the **70!** In a relatively short period of time, he was able to train and authorize people to go out and begin to share the Good News. The Christian Movement started from the

moment Jesus saw those men fishing by the Galilee and saw leadership potential in them. It continued as Paul saw the light and spread the word through throughout the Empire, and has continued through people like St. Francis and St. Teresa and Julian of Norwich and Martin Luther and Martin Luther King and William Barber... and people just like you and me.

What began as a small, rural movement in the Middle East has crested like a tidal wave and covered our whole world, because of leadership that was nurtured in small gathering places just like this.

As we move forward as a community, facing decisions about who we are and where we are going, we have choices. I think the choice is clear, though – that we can and should work together for the common good of this church, our community and our world by celebrating each other's gifts and nurturing new leadership skills. There is so much that this congregation can still do – more than you can imagine. You just need to be willing to drop the nets and follow and take on new opportunities, no matter what they may be.

And why? Because we're all in this together – we are companions in the wilderness and we are all welcomed here as we dwell in the shelter of God's love.

As Julian of Norwich reminds us today in our meditation: "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well."