

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

First Sunday in Lent - Year C

105th Sunday of Pandemic - In Person Worship

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Pslam 91:1-2, 9-16

Romans 10:8b-13

Luke 4:1-13

03/06/2022

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

¹Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." ⁴Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" ⁵Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" ⁹Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' ¹¹and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" ¹²Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the

test.’” 13When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

The Gospel of Our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Temptation

Good morning! Have I ever told you about the time I narrowly escaped certain death? It was many years ago, I was around 13 or 14 years old. Growing up my family had always had a boat, so we spent a lot of time on the Ohio River. One of the places that boaters would frequently hang out was called Pike Island. The place is so small that I doubt it even shows up on a map. Boaters would pull up on the beach side, hop out, and spend time with friends. Well, it was a little boring for me, my brother, and our friend. So, on one fateful day we decided to embark on a 3 man expedition around the island. (An island that I doubt was half a mile in length.) We left on our quest with hope and happiness in our eyes. And the beginning of the trek was easy. As we walked to the point and made our turn to walk down the other side of the island, it was then that we discovered why no one ever came to the other side. Our first obstacle was some mud. While the main side was sand, the current was slower on this side and so a great deal of river mud had collected. It was slippery at first, but it soon became a sucking, molasses pit of despair. Sinking 6-12 inches deep with every step, it took everything we had to keep going. It was then that we encountered the vegetation. We soon had to juggle soul-sucking mud with angry tree branches and sharp bushes. We had left barefoot in our swimsuits, this was a bad idea. The vegetation eventually became a thick forest that saw us

climbing up and over downed trees. I can still remember the scratches and cuts all along my arms, chest, and stomach. After what was certainly a four hour march (but was probably more like 30 minutes) we arrived back around to our boat. Exhausted, and injured both mentally and physically, we crashed next to my dad, begging for something to drink. Even 20 years later, I can still remember how worn out and defeated we felt when we got back. That was the time I narrowly escaped certain death, the time I braved the wilderness.

While Lent is very much a season, a set time, I have often compared it to a journey. Over the six weeks we travel towards the city of Jerusalem, to a cross, and to the death of Jesus Christ. It's a tough journey, and it certainly doesn't take the easy road. We take those first steps today in our lesson about the temptation that Jesus undergoes.

The first thing to note about today's text is where it fits in the larger Gospel of Luke. Like the other Gospels, Jesus is tempted directly after his baptism. While I said that Lent can be a journey, it is also a six week crash course in the essential story of the Gospels. And that story begins today when Jesus leaves his baptism and, as the text says, is full of the Holy Spirit. It's an interesting detail. The Holy Spirit seems to guide Jesus into an experience I think we would all call less than fun. While the language seems passive here in Luke, the Gospel of Mark is even more intentional. *"And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness."*¹ And even that isn't forceful enough, the Greek here in Mark is so strong you could imagine the Holy Spirit behind Jesus with a pitch fork, prodding him into the wilderness.

¹Mark 1:12 NRSV

When we hear that Jesus is in the wilderness we can be tempted to equate it with a desert, or a barren landscape. But that couldn't be further from the truth. The "wilderness" was a wild and lush place. While we're not talking a tropical jungle, it would have been full of life. Think of the woods of northern Louisiana and Alabama. The place of testing was also an important place for all of Israel. It was in the wilderness that Moses and the Israelites were lost for 40 years, a number we see reflected in the 40 days that Jesus is tempted. (Or what was likely 40 minutes for me on Pike Island!)

Another little detail I had not noticed before comes at the very end of the lesson. In verse 13 the text reads: *"13When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time."* It says that when the devil had finished EVERY test, he left. It seems to be suggesting that while we only hear about 3 specific temptations, these were far from the only times that the devil tested Jesus. The other detail is that these 40 days were not the last time that Jesus will undergo this temptation. The devil *"departed from him until an opportune time."* The creature isn't done with Jesus!

So what does all of this mean? Well... given that the Holy Spirit guided Jesus into the wilderness in the first place, it can at first seem that Jesus was meant to undergo all this hardship. But I think that's not only wrong, but dangerous. That type of logic has been used for years to justify unhealthy behavior. A better way to look at it is like this: when we set foot on that path that God has put before us, the devil will do everything in his power (even using scripture!) to try and dissuade us. Here's another example I once heard that I think helps. Have you ever played a video game? Well when you're playing a video game, if you're heading in the right

way, you'll encounter opposition! If you're just aimlessly walking around with nothing to do, that means you're not fulfilling the quest!

It's not that temptation is a part of God's plan, but that the devil is working to make it so that you want to turn around, to go back and give up. But don't give up! It's not easy, I know. And some of us have even harder journeys than the rest, but be steadfast. Take courage in the knowledge that you are on the path that God has set before you. So... join me in walking that hard road, leading towards Jerusalem and to a cross. Where we'll place our heavy burdens. Amen.