

Temptations & Promises

Psalm 91; Luke 4:1-14

On this, the First Sunday in the Season of Lent, we begin our journey with Jesus to the cross and to Resurrection. In the season of Lent we are invited to embrace an intentional way of life. For the 40 days (not counting Sundays) we follow the example of Jesus who was "led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for 40 days he was tempted by the devil."

Every First Sunday of Lent, the Christian lectionary takes us into this wilderness and narrates the story of Jesus being tempted by the devil. There are similarities among all three of the Gospel narratives offered up in the three-year cycle of lessons. Matthew, Mark and Luke tell the story in different ways and from different perspectives, but all of them suggest that Jesus experienced testing and temptation as a part of his spiritual experience and preparation for mission and ministry.

This year we encounter Luke's particular spin on the story. His unique take begins with the introductory words of the passage, "After his baptism, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where he was tempted." Jesus had been filled, brimful to overflowing, with the Spirit at his baptism. But the Spirit is not finished with him by any means. This same Spirit leads him into the wilderness. Actually, the Greek word translated in the text as "lead" might better be translated as "hurled, threw, impelled, directed." It's not a blithe spiritual expedition here. It is the very Spirit of God throwing Jesus into the physical wilderness and, even more so, hurling him into the wilderness of his own soul, his own call, his own identity.

The Spirit does not just drop Jesus off in the wilderness to fend for himself; the Spirit continued to abide with Jesus, enabling him to grow stronger through this season. In Luke 3:21-4:13 we are reminded that the Spirit's anointing of Jesus in baptism and Jesus' faithfulness to God amid the testing prepared Jesus for his ministry.

Though this passage is filled with symbolisms that could take us in many directions, there is, I think, one major point: Jesus chose God. And as Jesus chooses God, he also chooses his own call, his own mission, his own pathway of service and compassion.

Truth is, Jesus could have been terribly distracted by the things offered him. But, no, he doesn't get stuck, distracted, paralyzed by these tantalizing offers. Rather, he rests in the Spirit of God that led and threw him into this place and experience to begin with. And, still, brimful to overflowing with that Spirit, he chooses God; and he chooses to move ahead in his call and mission.

Luke, the Gospel-writer, continues to tell the story of Jesus' call and mission. The Spirit hurls Jesus into the wilderness. The temptations occur. Jesus chooses his call and mission. The devil goes away, "biding his time," as one translation puts it. Luke continues, "Then, Jesus armed with the power of the Spirit returned to Galilee."

He returns to his hometown but with clarity about his mission and purpose. Jesus attends the synagogue there, opens the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and reads these words, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me. He has sent me to announce good news to the poor, to proclaim release for the captives and recovery of sight for the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the Lord's favor." Then Jesus rolls up the scroll and says to the assembled worshippers, "Today, today, in your very hearing this text has come true."

There it is, there it is: Jesus comes out of the wilderness, out of his temptations, filled and armed with the Spirit. He proceeds to embrace his mission and be embraced by it. And that mission is clear in its purpose and focus: good news proclaimed, restoration and release, reconciliation and

renewal. Jesus embraces and is embraced by his mission. He breathes it. He lives it through preaching, teaching, healing and welcoming the outcast and poor. He shows it finally in his willingness to offer himself on the cross as an action of love poured out for all.

It is through our baptisms that we are called to be obedient and to serve the Lord. Our faith is tested each and every day in multiple ways, from birth to death. Like Jesus, we are filled to the brim with the Holy Spirit, in the wilderness with us- God with us.

Through Jesus we can triumph over the temptations of our lives, through the promise of God to be with us, "even to the ends of the earth."

Many people speak of "giving up" something for Lent. However, I contend that Lent is not about giving up, rather Lent is a time for us to be more intentional about "God-with-us" and intentional about receiving the Grace of God. Intentionally concentrating on fellowship, prayer, scripture meditation, concentrating on our baptismal covenant, acts of justice, reflecting on our repentance, are the focus of our journey during this Season of Lent. As we become more intentional in these actions during Lent, we, like Jesus, gain a spiritual depth to be faithful to God in times of trial and resist the bait of Satan. We choose God! Amen.