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"Wilderness"

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7 Matthew 4:1-11 Romans 5:12-19

INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Temptation is nothing new. In Genesis 2 humans are given their job description within limits. In Genesis 3 we read of their reassignment. Hear the word of the Lord from Genesis 2 and 3.

INTRODUCTION

Last week we read that Moses fasted 40 days and nights on Mount Sinai when he received the Law from God. This morning we read about Jesus fasting for 40 days and nights in preparation for his ministry to become our savior. The first Adam was tempted in a garden. Jesus, whom Paul calls the Second Adam was tempted in a desert wilderness. Please stand for the reading of the gospel of our Lord from Matthew 4:1-11

Let us pray

Almighty God, your Son fasted forty days in the wilderness, and was tempted as we are but did not sin. Give us grace to direct our lives in obedience to your Spirit that as you know our weakness, so we may know your power to save. You led your people through the wilderness and brought them to the Promised Land. So guide us, that, following our Savior we may walk through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come.

A mother was teaching her 3-year old daughter the Lord's Prayer. At bedtime, she repeated after her mother the lines from the prayer. Finally, she decided to go solo. Mom listened with pride as she carefully enunciated each word, right up to the end of the prayer: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us some E-mail."

Today that prayer might be easily be, "Deliver us FROM email." "For ALL have hit send and fallen short of the glory of God."

Immediately following His baptism Jesus faces the greatest temptations of His life. The issue was not whether He would rule the world, but how He would take it. So, out there in the wilderness of those barren Judean hills Jesus struggled with what He would do and how He would do it.

Sometimes we may not take this very seriously. We may not think Jesus was really tempted, not the way we are tempted, not our Jesus. But we need to understand that the temptations of Jesus were real temptations. Matthew tells us plainly that Jesus was in the wilderness tempted by the devil. He did not say Jesus wondered, imagined, was charmed, or that He considered his options. He tells us He was tempted. Indeed it says the Spirit LED him there for the purpose

of being tempted. That's not exactly the first thing on my list when I think of people being led by the Spirit.

The prayer our Lord taught his disciples to pray says, "Lead us not into temptation." I've always wondered why Jesus put that in there. Maybe the reason Jesus put this line in the prayer he taught his disciples to pray is because he's trying to say, "I was led into temptation and believe me, you don't want to go there." Or maybe the sense of it is that Jesus wants us to pray so that we will follow Him because if we follow where he leads we will be led away FROM temptation. (even though in doing so temptation as a way of catching up)

In Romans 5 the apostle Paul makes a comparison between Adam and Jesus. He calls Adam the first Adam and Jesus the second Adam. He makes the point that through one man, Adam, sin entered into the world, and that through one man Jesus, the Second Adam, forgiveness from sin enters the world. For Jesus to be the Second Adam, he must face everything the first Adam faced and every person since has faced and not give in. Hebrews 4:15 says that in Jesus, we have a great high priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses, because he was one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet was without sin.

For something to be a temptation it has to be a possibility. Yesterday I was not tempted to ride in the Gator Bike ride--even though Mike Wilson tried to tempt me by challenging me to join him in riding it next year. For one thing I couldn't afford the outfits. Second, if I could I wouldn't want to tempt any of the other riders by displaying my svelte form in spandex")

Everyone who has ever lived has been tempted. Each of us at one time or another has been tempted to do something we know we shouldn't do. Each one of us at one time or another have been tempted to stand by and not do what we know we should do. We may be even at this moment be being tempted--tempted to take a nap.

It's not a sin to be tempted. The sin comes when we give in to temptation. Remember the old hymn "Yield NOT to temptation, for yielding is sin?" Somehow that one has been left out of the new hymnals.

Jesus came to redeem us. He came to deliver us from bondage to sin. He came to undo what had been done. To do that, he had to face down every temptation we humans have ever faced and win.

James 1:13 says, "When someone is being tempted he should not say, "God is tempting me." God does not tempt anyone. It is the evil that a person wants that tempts him. His own evil desire leads him away and holds him."

Let's consider for a few moments the nature of the temptations Jesus faced and see if they apply to our lives as well.

First of all, BEFORE Jesus is tempted he spends 40 days and 40 nights without eating. This is the only time we know that Jesus fasted for 40 days. Indeed, during his public ministry the word on the street was that Jesus was more into feasting rather than fasting. His opponents accused him of being a "winebibber and a glutton."

One of the most understated passages of scripture comes next. Verse 2 says, "After that he was hungry." No kidding. This week I was on a clear liquid diet for 2 days and I was hungry.

Jesus faces these temptations in probably the weakest physical shape of his entire life. And he did it before he had done any miracles. He did it before he had a track record to look back on to build his confidence. .

1. The first temptation was the wrong use of power. There's no question that Jesus could have turned stones into bread. But Jesus knew who was tempting him and why. Jesus quoted scripture in response to the devil's challenge, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Jesus is saying is that there is more to life than having a full stomach.

One of the great temptations we face is the temptation to always have more. Happiness is just around the corner if only we have more things, or more wealth, or the finer things of life. This is the message with which our society bombards us.

Jesus overcame his first temptation by putting his complete trust in God. That's a good example for us. We're so concerned about "having it all." The wise person trusts that God will provide all that he or she needs.

2. In the second temptation, Jesus was tempted by the wrong way to popularity. This time the devil took him to the "pinnacle of the temple." Again the devil says to Jesus, "If you are the Son of God...", as if there was some question of Jesus' identity. The devil wanted Jesus to throw himself off of the temple. This time, to make the temptation even more appealing, the devil quotes scripture: "He will command his angels concerning you," and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."

Jesus once again countered the devil's temptation by quoting scripture, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." Of course, Jesus could have leaped from the temple and angels would have rescued him. He could have won the gold in pinnacle jumping and he would have won an instant following. People from all over would want to see him to jump from the temple again and again. When my daughter was little and I would pick her up and throw her up in the air and catch her and put her down she would lift her arms and wiggle her fingers and say "Do me-."over and over and over.

If Jesus had jumped I think some entrepreneurs would have figured out a way to sell tickets and make a pretty penny. But pretty soon, they would get tired of seeing him jump from the temple and would want him to jump from higher places. Jesus resisted the devil's second temptation because he knew that faith could not be built upon the sensational.

That's good advice for you and me. God is not to be found in the sensational, but in His everyday faithfulness.

3. Finally, Jesus was tempted by the wrong kind of partnership. The devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and promised, "All these I will give, if you will fall down and worship me."

All Jesus had to do at this point was to compromise his mission and his ministry. The devil was handing Jesus the whole world if only he would worship him. If Jesus would have given in to this temptation, he could bypass his suffering and death on the cross. This would be a short cut for Jesus, and it would be much more pleasant since it involved no pain. Jesus could have the whole world without having to suffer and die for it. What a temptation! Jesus, though, would not compromise. Again he quoted scripture, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."

There is no compromise in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus resisted the devil's third temptation. Jesus said, "Away with you, Satan!"

These three temptations were to try to get Jesus to use his gifts for his own selfish purposes, to base his witness on the sensational, to compromise his ministry and mission. It occurs to me that these are the three most enticing temptations that any church faces as well.

1. We could use our gifts only for our own satisfaction. We could spend all our money on ourselves and worry just about meeting our own needs by putting Faith Presbyterian First.

2. We could make our service a sideshow and seek to win people with a superficial witness to the Gospel. We could fashion our worship to meet the esthetic tastes of those who come. "You know, communion has been the same menu for 2,000 years. Why not spice up the bread by having pizza and pinot noir?"

3. We could compromise our ministry and our mission. Let's get people in here by soft pedaling the cost of discipleship and lowering the standards for membership. You don't have to believe Jesus is Lord. You don't have to try to live in a way that's pleasing to God. But we are the church of Jesus Christ. Jesus resisted those temptations, and so shall we.

How did he do it? Jesus faced and defeated temptation using the one weapon that is available to each of us--the scriptures. He countered each temptation with "It is written."

So I want to remind us today that in those times when we find ourselves trying to find our way through our wilderness, and when temptation comes and offers us the wrong answer, the wrong choice -- the wrong use of power, the wrong way to popularity, the wrong kind of partnership --God will give us the power to face and be victorious in our fight against temptation and trials in our ... wilderness.

Let's pray, Dear Lord, there are so many temptations in this world, and some of them seem so much like the ways You might have us to travel. Give us the wisdom, God, to discern between evil and truth.

Heavenly Father, you have created us above all creatures with a wonderful consciousness of ourselves and a marvelous potential for spirituality. Help us to seek and find our identities in you and your Word: that, properly centered, our lives may become holy, godly, and worthy to bear the name of the Christ.

Holy God, it pains us to confess just what messes our lives are as a result of our self-centeredness. We have tried to find ourselves in fads, philosophies, power, possessions, substances, superheroes, experts, and exercises, and still we feel off center, aimless, and worthless. Forgive us, we pray, and help us through your Spirit to get into touch with the image of yourself that you have planted within us, Hear us as we pray for the concerns on our hearts.

We pray for the family of Nona Rushing. Be with Jeani and Marvin as they prepare to celebrate her life. We pray for Leura Leissner who is battling pneumonia. And Bonnie Dyer who is recovering from a broken leg.