

Sermon Lent 1C

Do you remember going for an interview which secured for you the job you really wanted? What did it feel like? And when you were told you had been given the job how was it? My memories of being called by Judy Kilgore and told the Messiah vestry was calling me to be their rector was exciting. I had felt very good about being with the search committee and finally the vestry, I felt very positive about being here. However, I certainly did not go off for 40 days of temptation time!. I was too busy ending ministries there and packing up our home to come here.

But I invite you to reflect upon what Jesus did. I think something in Jesus heart and mind urged him to present himself before John on one particular day to be Baptized. His Baptism allowed him to hear God 's message coming from the heavens saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." I am sure if you heard the voice of God addressing you would be pleased for yourself, no doubt celebrating afterwards. However, St. Luke tells us no, Jesus full of the Holy Spirit, no doubt still dripping wet from the Jordan was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. It seems such an anti-climax, if ever there was one.

Jesus had to face temptations; you do too. You may have said "the devil made me do it!" and if you haven't you have probably heard others use it. In today's culture people want an excuse, a way out of their guilt for the sins (wrong doings if you prefer that term) they have committed. Your temptations are not the same as those Jesus faced and probably not the same as those of people around you have faced or are facing. But temptations are real. Jesus was in the wilderness a long time and must have been really hungry as time went by. He was tempted to provide food, a loaf of bread for himself and it was something he could have done but his miraculous powers were not for his own use, only in ministry for God. He fortified himself with words of scripture from Deuteronomy, "One does not live by word alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. "(St. Matthew gives the whole quote.) Yes, the needs of your body must be satisfied but not at the price of your soul.

Jesus used Holy scripture as defense against the devil. He used it again when the devil tempted him by offering him power over the whole world that, so we are told, had been taken over and under the control of the devil. Such a statement makes you pause and wonder if this is why our world is in such a terrible state This time Jesus quoted, "Worship the Lord your God and serve only him. Finally the devil tempted him to show spectacular powers, even quoting scripture as part of the temptation. But Jesus responded with. "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

Jesus needed to be there in that wilderness space; God wanted him to spend this time alone, in prayer, very vulnerable but in God's care. He had to rely completely on God for his care, safety, and company. Did he enjoy it? We do not know but God knew Jesus needed that time alone to prepare for his ministry. He had to face temptations to be other than the person God created him to be. The good news for you is that he did not succumb. One question to ponder over, when in his ministry did he sit down with his disciples and tell them about these experiences? The gospels do not say. Maybe after his resurrection; recognizing that all the disciples had fled when Jesus was arrested, and that Peter had denied him and of course Judas had betrayed him and later committed suicide. Thus had all succumbed to temptation; Jesus needed to tell them they were forgiven but also to show them that they could arm themselves with words of scripture to help deal with temptations.

Today you heard some of St Paul's words to the Romans. He wrote, "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart." I suggest that during this season of Lent you memorize words of scripture to help yourself in times of temptation. If you need suggestions for the scriptures I can help but you can always use the words Jesus used. You can always stick messages on your fridge or in your bathroom if you feel your memory is not so good any more.

Today's gospel described the temptations that came to Jesus. He could indeed have been the sort of Messiah the people yearned for; a military leader who would lead the nation to victory over Rome. But God showed Jesus he was to be among them as one who served, as one who showed them

the love of God and not violence and not to impress them by forceful leadership. Jesus stayed there for those 40 days and nights: a very long time to be alone. He had no cell phone, no lap top, no other people to communicate with. He had just the presence of God constantly with him.

I suggest to you that dealing with “being alone” is another of the important messages in the Gospel today. Jesus was completely alone out there in an area he called a wilderness. It must have been a deserted landscape with nothing other than a supply of water somewhere. He knew God was there with him,. He could speak with God at any time of the day and night. So he was alone when asked about human company, but he was always with God.

The scriptures tell us about many people who went through a wilderness but were all aware of God’s presence. Adam and Eve were turned out of the garden of Eden into inhospitable territory. They had to rely on God, their son, Cain, did too. Abraham journeyed hundreds of miles, many in wilderness territory, until he came to a place where God showed him he should live. Noah was in a watery wilderness, certainly not alone, but had to rely on God for his well-being. Moses and the Israelites spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness before they (at least their children) entered the Promise Land. The apostle Paul spent three years in Arabia and then another 14 years in preparation for his missionary work, as he wrote in his letter to the Galatians.

When I was in Minneapolis, I lived alone most of the time as Mike was working in Atlanta and just came to visit when he could. . Although I loved all the ministries I led, and I loved the people at the cathedral I was still living alone. It felt like a wilderness time, but I knew it to be one of learning and a time when I was very much dependent on God.

But one of the biggest temptations you can face is the one which tells you that you are alone and thus have to rely completely on yourself. When you think that way you can get the feelings of self-sufficiency and believe that you can do everything yourself. Little kids learning to do things will say or more often yell, “I do it myself!” I imagine there have been times when you have done something and felt very good about your achievement. But did you think of all the steps needed for you to be successful? You were taught, guided by others to enable to enable you to achieve that level of success.

It is also true that often in this world you can feel very alone. You have survived 2 years of covid restrictions and might have felt very alone on many occasions. It is at those times that you can and I hope do turn to God as your support, the one you can lean on, as a support for your anxieties and tears.

AS you heard today, Jesus defeated the devil and resisted those temptations which came to him. You might be admitting that you have already succumbed to the self-denials you had imposed upon yourself this Lent. The good news is that God loves you and will be with you in each day of this journey. God sustained Jesus and will sustain you.

We know that this time for Jesus did prepare him for his ministry. You can read in St Luke’s Gospel that afterwards he marched into Galilee and proclaimed the time was fulfilled, I understand him to mean his time for ministry was to begin, and that the kingdom of God had come near, and they were to repent and believe the good news.

A lot to think about as you are starting your Lent journey. Temptations will come to you often but do know that God will help you deal with them, all of them.

Let me close with words from writer Carl Dew,
Till all the jails are empty and all the bellies filled
Till no one hurts or steals or lies and no more blood is spilled
Till age and race and gender no longer separate
Till pulpit, press and politics are free of greed and hate
God has work for us to do.

Yes, God has work for you to do, today tomorrow and every tomorrow. And God has promised you will never be alone, God will always be with you. Amen