

“Core Training for the Disciple – Stretch”

Luke 4:1-13

Pastor Jon Haakana

Let us pray: Dear Heavenly Father, give us the courage to walk with your Son in faithfulness. Through the power of your Holy Spirit, give us wisdom to recognize the temptations that would lead us astray from a life of faith, and grant us the power to resist them. And as we move through this season of Lent, help us to recognize that the way of the cross is the way to life eternal in your heavenly kingdom. This we ask in Christ's holy name. Amen.

Today we will discover that following Jesus will always lead us into a wilderness. That's where the Spirit drove Him, and that's where His Spirit drives us. And in the wilderness, we are stretched. We are put into a position where we learn to trust God, even when He seems absent - especially when He seems absent. Jesus entered the wilderness and Satan brought temptations. And He was stretched and pulled, and Satan's intent was that He would snap. But, He didn't. He didn't put His Father to the test. He simply trusted. .

This morning we observe the first Sunday in the season of Lent. During this time we recall the journey of Jesus while on this earth, beginning with his experience in the wilderness for forty days. We take time to absorb its meaning; we use this season as a time of reflection, self-examination and preparation for the encounters that are to come. We take time to evaluate our lives as disciples of Jesus, examining our attitudes and actions and the areas of our lives that need transformation. Today we are invited into the wilderness with Jesus, to walk with him and learn from him so that we can grow spiritually and deepen our relationship with God.

“And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, for forty days being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days.”

Jesus' journey to the wilderness was a challenge both physically & spiritually.

- o Physically: the wilderness is an arid environment; wasteland; desert
- o It is devoid of life; scorching heat in the day, frigid cold at night
- o Spiritually: The wilderness is a place of spiritual testing and challenge.
- o Either way, it seems like the last place a person would go to willingly
- o So why would Jesus be brought to such a place?
- o Because, though the wilderness represents a place of great challenge, it is also a place where we can experience God powerfully and be transformed spiritually.

We imagine the wilderness temptation as three isolated events scattered over a forty-day period. In reality, Jesus' time of testing was nonstop; "for forty days being tempted by the devil." Satan got on Jesus like a shirt and refused to leave. Every step, whispering in his ear. Every turn of the path, sowing doubt. Was Jesus impacted by the devil? Apparently so. Luke doesn't say that Satan *tried* to tempt Jesus. The verse doesn't read, the devil *attempted* to tempt Jesus. No the passage is clear: "the devil *tempted* Jesus." Jesus was *tempted*, he was *tested*. Tempted to change sides? Tempted to go home? Tempted to settle for a kingdom on earth? I don't know, but I know he was tempted. A war raged within. Stress stormed without. And since he was tempted, he could have quit the race. But he didn't. He kept on running.

In our days spent in the wilderness, Satan tempts us, too. When God allows our faith to be tested He is using that time to draw us closer to Him. When Satan tempts, he is using that time to draw us away from God instead of closer. His attempts seek to ruin and destroy our faith, to lose hope and give up.

- The Effect of the Wilderness

- o But we often misunderstand the point of the wilderness
- o We don't see God's power at work and we feel lost and forgotten
- o In those times, the wilderness seems to be a place of abandonment and desperation; a place of suffering and death
- o When we fail to recognize the reason for wilderness it produces negative effects in us:

- DISCOURAGED

- o Exodus 16 - God's people living in the wilderness, sustained by God's supernatural provision, led by His Spirit, completely fail to recognize Him at work – they became discouraged.

- DISCONNECTED

- o Many Christians abandon the fellowship of God and his people
- o They feel embarrassed and ashamed that they are found in such a place
- o Or maybe they feel angry that God would allow such an experience

- DOUBT

Finally, the wilderness can lead us to question whether we were ever really following God at all.

Or we are being punished by being in the wilderness; that God has left us and we are on our own to make it out alive.

- The Value of the Wilderness

- o Don't avoid the wilderness, the times when we feel empty and dry

- o Instead, learn to survive it, learn to overcome it
- o Remember that God is at work in you, even in the wilderness
- o Using those moments to shape and bring change in our lives
- o The place of frustration is often the place of preparation

:: Surviving the Wilderness

There are a few keys to surviving the wilderness, regardless of how we arrive there.

- Be filled with the Holy Spirit
 - o He had been 'led by the Spirit' into the desert in the first place.
 - o He maintained fellowship with the Holy Spirit despite his experiences in the desert.
 - o We have a responsibility to ensure we are walking with Him.
- o Keeping in step with God
 - Galatians 5:25 - "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit"
- Set aside your desires and seek God
- Overcome temptation
 - o The Bible tells us that Jesus was tempted throughout his stay in the wilderness
 - o Our wilderness experiences bring us face to face with our base desires
 - o If we find ourselves in a spiritual wilderness, we must be sure to recognize our surroundings quickly, before we yield to temptation.

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Hebrews 4:15-16

We may not be able to resist every temptation that comes our way. We might even have moments of doubt and tests to our faith, as we seek to live the Christian life. But we have been baptized into Christ's death and resurrection. We have been given the gift of God's Holy Spirit, which can guide us through the struggles of our life. We have the Scriptures, God's Word for our life, by which we might plot the course to walk in relationship with God.

And through our participation in the life of Christ's church, we are not left alone to our own defenses. We have the support of those who share our faith, to help us navigate through the temptations that come our way, and to experience the forgiving grace of God.

So let us take up our cross, and strive to walk with Christ throughout this Lenten season, and the rest of our lives. For God has claimed us as his own, heirs of his kingdom.

Amen.