

First Sunday in Lent

March 10, 2019

Sermon by Pastor Cindy Bullock

The Holy Gospel according to Saint Luke. (Luke 4:1-13)

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where 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. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And 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. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Then 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, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

The Gospel of our Lord.

Grace and peace to you from peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever been riding in a car on a long trip, and you fall asleep. Then, when you wake up, you look around and think, What's going on? "What city am I in?" Or have you walked up to a group of people, in the middle of a conversation, and you have absolutely no idea what they are talking about? "He did what? Oh, you're talking about somebody else." It's confusing when you come in the middle.

Be clear. Today we come in the middle of a story. We hear, "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil." It's like we find Captain Kirk battling the evil Klingon commander and the Enterprise is about to blow up...and we don't even know why they're in the Neutral Zone.

Today's story doesn't begin in the desert. It begins in the river Jordan. It begins with Jesus' baptism. If you're going to understand the desert, you have to start with baptism. Start with Jesus hearing the words "You are my beloved." We have to start with beloved.

This morning, two children will be marked with an oily cross and will hear those words whispered... beloved. We will pray for the spirit to fill them.... that will make a difference in all the rest of their lives. All the rest of their story. Beloved is where it all begins.

Today's gospel doesn't make sense if Jesus just enters the wilderness. We have to know he is the beloved. We have to know he is already full of the spirit. But be clear – Jesus is vulnerable. It is wilderness. He is cold, alone and hungry. And with need comes temptation. With need comes the temptation to forget who you are. To forget you are the beloved.

Enter the devil. Now there is some question if the devil is the evil empire out for the destruction of the reign of God, or if the devil, is like a hard prosecuting attorney, who is looking for any sign of guilt. The devil is presented both ways in the bible. Here the devil arrives to a cold, tired, hungry Jesus and says, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread."

"If you are the Son of God..." We often read that as "Hey, Jesus. Prove your powers!" If you're the Son of God, Prove it. I think it's more subtle than that. Jesus knows he is the Beloved. No Question. Good heavens – God spoke from the sky to tell him so. You don't forget that easily.

Jesus doesn't need to prove himself, or show off that he's God's son. Just like we don't have to prove that we're good Christians. We're already declared "Son or Daughter of God" – We're already the beloved. We're in. We just have to figure out what it means... what beloved means

The devil is saying, "Look at that. You're the Son of God, so you can make stone bread. You can have whatever you want." The Temptation is to define "Beloved" as I get what I want. I'll never be in need. It's like saying, "I'm a Christian, so my prayer's will all be answered, and God will give me what I want.

Here Jesus teaches us what beloved means, "The beloved doesn't focus on himself or his own needs. The beloved embraces obedience." -- *One does not live by bread*

alone, but by every word that flows from the mouth of the LORD. Deuteronomy 8:3.
The Beloved listens to and obeys God, trusting that God will give what we need.

Okay, that's one. The thing about temptations is that they're not one and done... right? We're constantly invited to redefine who we are. Constantly tempted to question what "beloved" means. The Devil goes on... leading him up to see the kingdoms of the world. *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. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.* Now there's a temptation we can relate to. There's a temptation we swim in every day.

The devil offers the kingdoms of the world. Can he really deliver on that promise? Are the kingdoms of the world his to give? Oh, it's tempting to believe all the false promises. "Act this way and you'll fit in. Do this and you'll be safe. Buy this and you'll be beautiful. Try this practice you'll be fulfilled. We can have it all... if those promises can deliver.

The Beloved turns instead to the promises of God – as in: *God will be with you no matter what. God will provide abundantly for you. God will forgive. God will give eternal life. God will listen to you.*" The Beloved will not pursue false promises. Jesus replies *Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.* The beloved doesn't embrace false promises of glory, wealth, beauty, fulfillment. The beloved trusts the promises of God. That's what it means to be the Beloved.

The temptations continue. *the devil took [Jesus] 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, for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you," and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'*

It's a quote from Psalm 91 – We sang it a bit earlier, remember? Psalm 91 describes this beautiful life long relationship with God in which God saves. *You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide... (who rest) ...in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust."* It describes being with God and learning to trust God over time. Not one moment.

The devil collapses time into one moment. One moment of hope or despair to define a life of faith. Faith doesn't work that way. The Beloved can't be defined by any one moment. Any one crisis of desperation or one pinnacle of glory. Faith takes time. Trust is built over time. We learn and practice and grow into our identity as the Beloved over a lifetime. We can't define it as one moment. And so the Beloved says, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' The beloved will wait, and learn, and grow.

When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time. The temptations are never over. We are always invited to redefine what “Christian” is for our own benefit. Always tempted to make “Beloved” about me. But Jesus reminds us today, that we are those who commit to obedience to God. We are the ones who trust God’s promises. We are the ones who practice and grow in faith over time.

That’s who we are. That’s how we live our lives, make our decisions, face our problems, hope for a better world. As the Beloved. Knowing we are the beloved and knowing what beloved means, is where we begin. Amen.