

02 26 23 Talking Points The Stark Wilderness of Truth and the Waters of New Life

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7

Psalms 32

Romans 5:12-19

Matthew 4:1-11

TALKING POINTS SERMONETTE: “The Stark Wilderness of Truth and the Waters of New Life”

Focal Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted^a by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

⁴ Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:

“‘He will command his angels concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”

⁷ Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

SERMONETTE:

“The Stark Wilderness of Truth and the Waters of New Life”

Our focal scripture this morning opens with startling words of Matthew:

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Jesus, although Divine, demonstrates that His humanity is enlivened, benefited by, and understanding that He must, follow the Spirit where the Spirit leads.

The temptation Jesus faces in the wilderness comes after fasting “forty days and forty nights” (Mark 1:13, Luke 4:2)

40.

40 is a special number in scripture.

Remember the rain of the great flood fell upon the earth for 40 days and nights while Noah and his family waited for their deliverance in the ark (Gen 7:4, 12-16; 9:8-16)

Moses fasted in the presence of the Lord for 40 days and night atop Mount Sinai as God gave him the 10 commandments for His people.

Elijah followed the Lord’s urging and fasted for 40 days and nights as he fled to Mount Sinai (aka Horeb) where in 1st Kings 19:7-12 we are told Elijah encountered God.

The number 40 is deeply rooted in Israel’s struggle to practice faithfulness in the wilderness, day and night. (ex 13:21-22; 16:2-21; 24:18; Deut 8:1-20) **Feasting on the Word Robert A Bryan t*

And the Israelites didn’t wait faithfully. They gave in to temptation and formed a golden calf that they turned and worshipped.

The wilderness experience is really a test of our trust of God.

Jesus, Matthew tells us, enters into this moment prepared, led by the Spirit, and obedient to the will of God.

Jesus has a purpose, to show us how to endure in the wilderness.

Matthew provides us a window into this encounter and shows us what is at the heart of every temptation.

From the beginning in Genesis, we see the enemy tempt his victims as he asks his victims to question ‘is that what God really said?’

The serpent in the garden of eden asked ‘did God really say you couldn’t eat...twisting and distorting the word of God to the early humans.

When we don’t know the word of God for ourselves, we are open to accept any false interpretation that sounds good to our ears.

The admonition to us is that we should seek, speak and to know the word of God. If we don't know God's word, the devil uses that as an opportunity to fill our head with doubt misinformation and lies

Ultimately, the wilderness test is not so much if we will do the right thing, but if we will know God enough through His word to trust that He will do what He has promised for us?

The **first** temptation variation put before Jesus is:

-the temptation to do the miraculous at the devil's bidding

The enemy tries to use the hungered body of Jesus in that first temptation by asking Jesus to set aside the laws of nature and undoing the creation that God has determined.

In the beginning when God created all creation, he created each thing to have an order and a place in the universe. All things that God

creates are important and have a beauty in it's place in nature. God looks at all that He has created and calls it 'good'

When the enemy tempts Jesus to turn bread into stones, he is really asking Jesus to undo the order that God has created things to suit his own needs.

Jesus, “turn this stone to bread” request is no more viable or respectful of the natural order than is a big manufacturing company looking at the water, the lakes and streams and saying for our purpose to save a few dollars we will dump our pollutants into the pristine water and contaminate it. Destroying the water for profit or any reason harms the 'good' of the earth that God created. People cannot enjoy the drink of water and the plants can no longer thrive as God intended.

When God created the universe and all things in it, declared creation “very good”, meaning “very good” with its limits and all.

God created and determined that there is a way of being in the world that is right, that follows justice, and that calls for peace and caring of

our fellow man and the creation that He ensured would be used to delight and declare the glory of God.

Jesus’ response to changing stone to bread is simply “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”
(Mt 4:4)

Christ uses the Word of God to battle with the enemy, and in so doing demonstrated for us how we should face our own obstacles and challenges of life when we face a test. Go to the Word.

Stones were not intended to be bread, but Jesus shows us the Word of God was intended to do battle.

The **second** temptation variation put before Jesus is:

-the temptation to question your identity in God.

Matt 4: 5b-7: “Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:

“He will command his angels concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’ ”

⁷ Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ”

If the enemy can get you to question your identity in Christ, He can move you away from thinking the identity God gave you and Christ solidified as a child of God, “*if you are God’s Son*” is the temptation hanging from the enemy’s lips.

If he can get you to question your identity and your place in God’s created order, you are on a slippery slope with nothing concrete to hold on to.

The Psalmist says

Psalm 92:7 You are my hiding place;
you will protect me from trouble
and surround me with songs of deliverance.

God says as His child you are worthy of God’s protection, His love, the hiding place of His being. He forms us, names us, creates, protects and cares for us.

Jesus saw through the enemy’s temptation to create a spectacle and declared “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ”

Tempting God forces God to do the bidding of the devil. It degrades the very notion of a God who is miraculous, and demeans us as we demand of God to act like a puppet.

The **third** temptation variation put before Jesus is:

-the temptation to use and wield political power.

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

This is the most devastating I think of all the three temptations. In the first two the enemy tries to sneak in that he wants you to do his bidding and accomplish what he wants.

This third and final time, almost in a final desperate act, he comes right out and says what he really wants, ... “I want your worship”.

We don't have to look very far to find those in our political realm who seem to have run for offices simply for what they can get out of it. Their actions show that they don't know or don't care about God of love and peace. Where they could make peace, they bring destruction and war.

Where they could pass legislation to help educate, clothe, feed, house and provide medical care to all, they simply do for themselves or for their select group of insiders.

God calls us to be so much more.

Jesus calls us to do for the least of these as we would do for Christ.

Individually and corporately, Jesus sets the example of how we should meet the temptation in our own lives.

Christ's response in times of wilderness wandering is at all times “... “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

I called our temptations of Jesus in the wilderness “Temptation Variations”

Why?

I offer to you that the temptations are about being god, power, spectacle, vain glory, choosing to ignore God’s creation in order to satisfy ourselves, but the temptations are at their heart about that temptation that befalls mankind since the beginning in the Garden of Eden.

They are all variations on one thing and one thing only.

The real temptation is, ‘will we trust God in all times and in all circumstances?’

The focus of the temptations is really about trust, it is about faith and faithfulness you feel God has towards you.

If the enemy can get you to question

-what God said

-who you are in God,

-what God says you are

-if God is worthy of your worship

He is on the path to winning and getting you to stop trusting in God to deliver you.

Ultimately, the question is will you trust God to come alongside you and deliver you? If He chooses not to deliver you as fast or as completely as you think He should, will you trust in Him to reveal newness in your situations?

The very text Jesus quotes to the devil, Deuteronomy 8.3 is about *both* food and trust. It was a quote from when the chosen people were wondering in the wilderness to get to the promised land.

The bread of angels, manna from heaven, was given to human beings to teach them to trust God. Here are Moses’s words, the caps are the quoted part by Jesus.

“He [Yahweh] humbled you by letting you hunger [Jesus is probably really hungry – his human body has not eaten in 40 days and nights] then by feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, in order to make you understand that ONE DOES NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE, BUT BY EVERY WORD THAT COMES FROM THE LORD.” (Deut 8.3)

As Psalm 78 puts it, God commanded the heavens to rain down manna and *“humans ate the bread of angels”* (78.25) or as Psalm 81 says of God, *“Open your mouth wide and I will fill it”* (81.10).

Will Jesus test God over whether he can put a table out in the wilderness? Will he test God by demanding that he turn stone to bread at the insistence of the devil?

Or will he trust God to command and the angels will deliver food to him. Will he trust in God’s saving power?

Others fall to temptation in their wilderness experience, because they won’t trust God fully.

Through Adam, sin entered the world.

Israel bowed and worshiped false gods in the Golden Calf. The devil promises what Psalm 2 promises, the inheritance of the nations. The “Son” is supposed to inherit the nations (Ps 2.7-9). Jesus can be King yet. Just *“fall down and worship me”* (4.9).

But Jesus, who has been preparing for this wilderness journey by seeking God in the wilderness, fasting and praying in the isolation and the solitude. One on one with God Almighty.

Jesus’s response to the tempter is *“worship the Lord and serve him only”* quoting Deuteronomy 6.13.

Jesus relives the Story of Israel in the wilderness. He is spiritually retracing their wilderness journey. Only Jesus is doing it the way it should have been done. He demonstrates that His trust in God and God’s timing is sure.

Jesus will show us in His example what trust in God looks like.

Matthew ends his testing narrative with *“then the devil left him and suddenly the angels came and waited on him”* (4.11).

Jesus did not stumble in the wilderness and God did in fact spread a table in the wilderness and the angels “waited” on Jesus.

During the 40 days of Lent we come to our own time of ‘preparation’, knowing that we also have a purpose in God.

Jesus calls us to walk and work with Him along life’s narrow way.

As we journey to Easter the scriptures invite us to come in and discover a God who can be trusted to lift us out of our own wilderness experience.

He invites you to trust in the God who loves you so that He would make a way for you where there seems to be no way.

In the middle of the wilderness, God wants to lay a blanket with a feast for you and the living water of Jesus Christ to quench your thirst with the living water.

That’s what Lent is all about. It is rediscovering and trusting in God anew.

He is worthy of your trust.

AMEN..

CHALLENGE

The central idea for this first Sunday in Lent are temptation and how we respond.

Driven into the wilderness by the Spirit and armed with only God’s word, Jesus confronts temptation at the end of his forty days and nights of fasting without yielding to it. In doing so Christ demonstrates that He and He alone is worthy of being called our Savior and the center of our lives. And he shows us how to demonstrate that we trust in God in our own times of temptation come.

If the enemy can get you to question

-what God said

-who you are in God,

-what God says you are

-if God is worthy of your worship

He is on the path to winning and getting you to stop trusting in God to deliver you.

As you journey through this holy season of Lent, remember that Christ undertook His journey to the cross from heaven above for you. In our weaknesses we are made strong because of the presence of Jesus Christ.

Look to the word of God and the savior knowing that He can and will be with you in your own seasons of wilderness temptation.