

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

Every year in our lectionary cycle, the first Sunday in the season of Lent always begins with Jesus either being led or driven into the wilderness, NOT by devil, but by the Holy Spirit or as we hear today that Jesus is full of the Holy Spirit and that the Spirit *is* with Jesus in the wilderness. I am especially fond of Mark's account of Jesus in the wilderness appointed for the first Sunday of Lent in year B. Mark's account is very succinct and to the point. According to Mark, immediately after his Baptism, Jesus is driven into the wilderness for forty days. It sounds as if Jesus was still dripping wet and heading into the wilderness where he is tested by the devil.

And on this day, we say that we continue our "journey" through Lent that began on Ash Wednesday. And yes, I began the sermon this past Wednesday evening by saying that we gather to prayerfully begin our Lenten journey, but I am reminded once again by Luke's account that the forty days of Lent are not a journey for us. Some argue that Lent is not a journey because Lent represents a focused period of introspection and spiritual preparation leading up to Easter, rather than a continuous physical or metaphorical movement to a new location. Listen again to the closing line of our appointed Gospel lesson:

¹³ When the devil had finished every test, he departed from [Jesus] until an opportune time.
(Luke 4:13)

Lent may come to a close but the testing by the devil does not. What Luke is reminding us here is that Jesus defeats the devil and all his testing and pays no mind to his empty promises during his forty days in the wilderness, but the devil does not go away...he departs until an opportune time. Jesus will face this testing again as he prays in the Garden of Gethsemane and at Golgotha from the cross. But this constant testing of one's faith is also what Jesus taught the disciples as he journeyed with them to the cross. On that journey, Jesus is confronted and tested concerning his healing, his miracles, and his preaching. This is why Lent is not so much a journey through forty days, rather Lent is a period of time set aside for the restoration and renewal of faith...restoration and renewal of trust in the Word of God...a trust that will journey with us for more than forty days...it will journey with us to our death and beyond. Testing and temptation will be with us always along our journey, but these forty are set aside to reflect and renew a deeper sense of trust in the word of God.

This lesson today that finds Jesus in the wilderness is not a demonstration for us to simply emulate over the next five weeks of Lent by giving something up and then when it's all over, returning right back to *our* old ways. Today in the Gospel passage we are reminded *by the devil*, that Jesus is the Son of God, he is a servant, and he is the paradigm of the new humanity who vanquishes the powers of evil through the Holy Spirit and through his trust in the word of God.

What we see today in this passage is that the trust of Jesus and the faith of Jesus is not in his own ability to overcome the testing of the devil, but rather his trust and faith is in the graciousness of God his Father. But we also see his reliance on God's Word as his secure weapon in the conflict and testing. This is the Good News for us...it's not so much about our ability to stand up to the testing of the devil, the Good News is that God has poured a faith into our hearts, a faith that allows us to see the Word of God as our reliance and our salvation in the time of trial when we are confronted in the wilderness of our everyday lives.

This is why I like Mark's account of Jesus heading into the wilderness immediately after he is Baptized. Likewise, immediately following our Baptism, whether we were Baptized as an infant, a child, a teenager, a young adult, or as a senior citizen, and yes, I have baptized a few senior citizens, we all immediately come up from the water and head out into the wilderness called life where we are all tested by the devil for much more than forty days. For you see, its not just a selected forty days that we return to a deeper sense of God in our lives...these forty days of Lent are here to renew a deeper sense of faith that reminds us that we are Baptized or preparing to be Baptized. During these forty days may we reflect and remember our baptism and put it to use in such a way that we may draw strength and comfort from it when our sins or conscience oppress us, and say: "But I am baptized! And if I have been baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body."¹

These forty days show us that God's Word incarnate is the paradigm of the new humanity who vanquishes the powers of evil through the Holy Spirit and through faith in the graciousness of God the Father. The Word of God that is present in this worship is not here just for these forty days, it is with us always, with us every time we are tested in the wilderness of our everyday lives, the Word is with us every time we gather...every time we are led by the Holy Spirit to this place of worship to be in the presence of God in Word and in Sacrament. And what we learn today is *NOT* how *we* vanquish the challenges, the temptations, and the testing of the devil, rather Jesus shows us today from the wilderness his humanity, he shows how close he is to our human nature...by showing us a trust in the word of God.

The real lesson today in the Gospel passage is not how we can become righteous when we are tempted; rather we are shown that Jesus is tempted just as we are tempted, Jesus is tested just as we are tested, and Jesus suffers just as we suffer because of it. But Jesus also shows us a reliance and a trust in God's word when he becomes famished and is tested by the devil to turn rocks into bread. Jesus turns from the devil and his human weakness, and quotes Deuteronomy:

⁸...one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. (Deuteronomy 8:3)

When asked to worship the devil, Jesus shows his true heart and responds with the words from Exodus:

You shall worship the Lord your God,
(Exodus 23:25)

When the Sonship of Jesus is challenged by the devil who asks him to throw himself of a high pinnacle...the devil does so by quoting the psalm that is appointed for us today, Psalm 91, but Jesus again shows his reliance and trust in God's word when he responds once again with the words of the law from Deuteronomy:

Do not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.
(Deuteronomy 6:16)

¹ Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000, "The Large Catechism" Forth Part: Concerning Baptism, page 462.

What we learn today from Jesus, is NOT how to best the devil by quoting scripture. What we learn is to trust the Word of God and let the word of God guide our actions. In this exchange between Jesus and the devil in the wilderness, we hear our sinful reactions from the devil when he appeals to our egos, our desires, and our comforts. But like Jesus, we have all of this through our trust in God's word and this is what vanquishes the devil. Despite all that challenges us as human beings, we are rescued by trust...by faith in God's word. Our rescue comes from our trust in the Lord, our faith in Jesus Christ.

Today in the wilderness, Jesus is showing us what Moses addressed in his final speech to the Israelites concerning God's Word of fidelity when he urged them to trust and have faith in God's word of promise to them. Moses says this:

¹¹ Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. ¹⁴ No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe. (Deuteronomy 30:11,14)

Paul also makes clear the nearness of Christ in our Epistle reading today:

⁸ "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹ because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. ¹¹ The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. ¹³ For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

And it is here in this gathering that we have sung the words of Luther's hymn, Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word

¹ Lord, keep us steadfast in your word;
curb those who by deceit or sword
would wrest the kingdom from your Son
and bring to nought all he has done.

³ O Comforter of priceless worth,
send peace and unity on earth;
support us in our final strife
and lead us out of death to life.

Today as we all sit in the wilderness of our weakness, we TURN to God in the worship through the guidance of the Holy Spirit...and we turn to that Word that is near, that Word that is the bread and wine of this Holy Eucharist, that is freely given to feed our broken, famished sinful souls. By the grace and mercy of God we are guided by the Holy Spirit and gathered around this Holy Word and the Sacrament of this Holy Meal. In them we are freed from the bondage of our self-centered sin that causes us to be led another way. The psalmist reminds us that right now at this moment that we have not vanquished the devil's testing with our deeds or our works, rather, the Holy Spirit has guided us into the shelter of the Most High, and through the Holy Spirit we abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

May that same Holy Spirit forever guide our hearts and minds as we journey through the wilderness of our lives. And in those difficult times may we be led by the Holy Spirit to boldly proclaim, that the Lord God is our refuge and our stronghold, may we all trust in that God who will support us in our final strife and lead us out of death to life.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.