

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Psalms 91:1-2, 9-16

Romans 10:8b-13

Luke 4:1-13

## Sermon March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022

### *The Spirit Is with Us in the Wilderness*

When I was a teenager, I saw the definition of temptation through a very narrow lens. The constant message I heard from the trusted adults in my life were: Don't drink. Don't smoke. Don't do drugs. Don't dance (**Image**). Don't steal. Don't cheat. Don't lie. Don't cheer for the Flames. I was told to stay away from people who might pressure me into doing these things. Of course, like most teenagers, I didn't listen very well to most of this guidance.

When I went to seminary, I was challenged to see the definition of temptation through a much broader lens than what I saw as a teenager. I learned that avoiding temptation was more than trying to avoid the temptation of doing things that could harm others or myself. Avoiding temptation also meant to avoid that temptation to depend too much on things other than God for my wellbeing. For example, leaning too heavily on money (**Image**). Or leaning too heavily on our own merits when experiencing successes. Or leaning too heavily on other voices outside of God's when making decisions in our lives.

Not all of these latter temptations lead to obvious harm towards others or ourselves. Not all those who tempt us in these ways are out to hurt others or us. Some people believe that leaning on money will help one better care for others and themselves. Some people believe that praising oneself consistently builds them up to be a contributing member of society. Some people believe that their advice will help people out. And to some degree this is true.

The temptation comes when we are tempted to lean more heavily on these things than leaning on God for our wellbeing. For example, when our dependence on money leads to greed instead of sharing. Or when we stop giving thanks to God for our successes, and instead praise ourselves for these successes. Getting swelled heads. Becoming exalted. Looking down on others. Judging others. Discriminating against others. Marginalizing others. Or when we stop listening/communicating with God, and are influenced by voices that contrast what God wants for our lives. Or when we doubt God's care for us, and try to make it happen on our own merits.

I find that these latter temptations seem to be harder for us to name, because we are taught growing up to strive for success. To strive for material wealth. We are taught to take care of ourselves, and to expect others to do the same. We are taught to listen to those voices that will give us the best advantages in this world.

These latter temptations are socially acceptable. Unlike, the ones we are taught to avoid growing up. And like I said before, these temptations only become temptations when we put our motivations for wealth, our self-gratitude, and other voices ahead of God in our lives.

Today is the first Sunday in Lent. Today we reflect on our relationship with God, and on how much we really depend on God for our wellbeing.

Martin Luther when talking about our dependence on God's grace stated that all we have to do is look at the First Commandment to see that we cannot fulfill the commandments on our own merit. We struggle to put God first.

Well, in our gospel this morning, we hear about Jesus' experience with temptation. We hear Jesus' response to the temptation he faces. We hear where God is present when Jesus faces temptation.

Jesus is in the wilderness, in a vulnerable state, facing opportunities to depend on something other than the Creator. First it is material things, riches that Jesus is tempted to depend on for his wellbeing. Second, it is someone else's voice that he is tempted to depend on. Third, Jesus is tempted to lean on his own merits, faith, to overcome his fate.

In all three responses to these temptations, Jesus depends on the Creator before anything else. In all three responses to these temptations, Jesus gives us an example to follow when facing the temptation to depend on something or someone other than God in our lives.

First, it is God's word that we are invited to depend on (**Image**). Not the bread we eat. Or the money we earn. When we dedicate time to read and reflect on the word of God in our daily lives, we find ourselves depending on these words for guidance, for comfort, for hope, for healing, for our wellbeing.

Second, it is God that we are invited to worship (**Image**). Not some other voice. By worshipping God, in essence, we are putting God before everything else. We are moving God back to the center of our lives. Whether, it is listening attentively to the Word being proclaimed in a sermon. Or praising God through song. Whether, it is communicating to God in prayer. Or receiving God's forgiveness and renewal in the sacrament. The challenge for us is to continue to put God first when we leave the worship setting.

Third, we are invited to trust in God's care for us, and not try so hard to make it happen on our own merits. Or in other words, it isn't so much about what we do, but about what God does for us. That shapes us into the people God created us to be.

As we reflect on Jesus' three responses to his temptation, we hear Jesus' invitation for us to depend on God for our wellbeing. Before anything else.

Now, this isn't always easy. Some temptations are hard to resist. Especially, when falling into these temptations gives us a sense of security and control over our lives. It is really hard for us to let go of that need to control things, and depend on God for our wellbeing. Mostly, because this makes us vulnerable.

This is why Jesus isn't alone when he goes into the wilderness. The Spirit is with him. Giving him the faith, wisdom, strength, and hope to overcome the temptations that come his way.

In our baptism, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (**Image**). The Spirit that walks with us into the wilderness. The Spirit that points us to the Bible when we are tempted to rely on something else for our wellbeing. The Spirit that leads us to worship when we start putting ourselves before God and others. The Spirit that humbles us when we become exalted. The Spirit that opens our hearts to trust in God's grace, not our own merits.

The Spirit is with us as we wander in the wilderness of temptation. Giving us what we need to put God first. So that we can be Jesus' hands and feet in our world.

Let us pray, loving God, thank you for your Spirit that helps us deal with the temptations we face. Thank you for the scriptures that help guide us. Thank you for worship that draws you back to the center of our lives. Thank you for your saving grace that heals us, and redeems us. That invites us to come as we are. Wounds and all.

**Amen.**

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