

Luke 4:1-13  
February 14, 2016

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

On this day, Valentine's Day, it would only have seemed appropriate for the stars to have aligned properly in order that we were given a passage that simply gushed forth with words of love. Oh, wouldn't that love hymn from the thirteenth chapter of Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth we had just a couple weeks ago been perfect with beautiful words such as: "Love is patient; Love is kind... Love never ends." (1 Corinthians 13:1-13) Or, "God is love"; three words from 1 John which summarize the thrust of the entire book. (1 John 4:16) Or we could have even had one of the gospel passages in which Jesus summarizes all the law in two commands, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind... and love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:36-40) Indeed, it would seem at face value these would have been much better options for this day in our society which is all about love and relationship.

Instead, our lectionary dishes out a gospel passage of the Holy Spirit leading Jesus into the wilderness where He is tempted by the conniving and crafty one who is an adversary of God and God's will. This text doesn't seem to even remotely ooze forth a drop of that divine love we come each Sunday so desperately in need of, grasping just a small drink of, savoring just the tiniest of morsels of, and seeing just a sparkle of in the

midst of the darkness, which often engulfs our lives and world. Oh, how we and so many others long to come and simply experience for a moment that love of our Creator to satisfy our needs and sustain us for the week ahead. But it appears the so-called lectionary “gods” have withheld from us the joy of basking in a story of that love this morning.

In the words of the title of a song by the Black Eyed Peas, “Where is the love?” Well, it was in chapter 3 just mere verses prior to our text this morning in which Jesus was baptized, the Spirit descended upon Him, and a voice came from heaven stating, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” (Luke 3:22) But then almost immediately as Jesus is baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit it is that same Spirit of God who leads Him into the wilderness where He was tempted by the devil and for 40 days ate under the hot sun and cool nights of a middle-eastern desert. Where is the love of the Father as He sits seemingly idle and watches from afar to see how Jesus will handle the wily foe who tries to drive a wedge between Father and Son and get Jesus to trust not in God but rather use His power to satisfy His own needs and derail Him from the mission God has set before Him. Ultimately, that’s what this passage is about. It’s an attempt by the enemy to get Jesus to question His true identity as the Son of God, whom God loves and whom God is well pleased with. It’s an opportunity for the adversary to put the bug in Jesus’ ear leading Him to question the love of Father. In so many ways this is a very difficult passage for us to relate to and raises challenging

questions. Namely, just why in the world would the Spirit lead Jesus into the wilderness seemingly knowing He would be tempted by the devil? This just doesn't fit our image of a loving God. We long for a God that provides for our every want and desire and doesn't leave us famished in the remote confines of a wilderness setting. We long for a God who leads us not into temptation but rather delivers us from evil. And what we get here simply seems to be the opposite of everything we expect leaving us to ask just where is the love? Yet, let us not be so quick to dismiss God's activity in this text and cast our own images and expectations of who God is and should be into this passage. At times, that is where we humans get into trouble isn't it? This is where we seemingly tempt Jesus and put Him to the test by trying to place God into a box and expecting God to be exactly who we want God to be and when we hear passages such as this we simply want to write them off, dismiss them as perhaps just another parable or allegory that didn't really happen but are nothing but a fabrication in order set before us an image and reveal to us something about the kingdom of God.

While at times we indeed may put God to test, there are most certainly times in which we can relate to some extent the temptations Jesus endures in our text wherein the devil's trickery tries to turn us from God, give into the false hopes and promises offered, and lead us to distrust God's faithfulness, providence, and even lose sight of our baptismal identity and question God's love for us. We flail, flap, and flee but their torment is relentless and inescapable. We each find ourselves in a spiritual wilderness –

alone and famished by fending off the manipulative voices and promises of the evil one.

Will we ever win this battle?

And then through the darkness, isolation, and hunger of the wilderness we catch just a glimpse of the light and we begin to see it – the love we so long for. There it is where we didn't expect to find it. There in the midst of our wilderness wanderings God was shaping us into the people God created and called us to be. Just as God did to Israel in their wilderness wandering prior to leading them into the Promised Land. We perceive God has abandoned us and left us for dead. Yet, that simply is not the case. This passage never tells us the Spirit left Jesus. Yes, we hear He was famished physically from not eating but we are not told anything about Him being drained of the Spirit which had filled Him at His baptism and would sustain Him for what lie ahead. In fact, if we read further verse fourteen tells us Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit. Where is the love we might ask? It is right there and the promise we will never be alone in our wilderness wanderings. God's Spirit will always be near ready to fill us with the love of God and sustain us, transform us, and shape us into the people God has destined us to be. The love of God is found as God, in Jesus, continues God's ongoing battle with the evil forces of the world. Where is the love? It is found in Jesus, fully divine but clearly in this passage He took upon Himself the fullness of His humanity, our humanity, to experience first-hand and fully the messiness of life including the temptations Adam and Eve succumbed to, the Israelites fell host to in not trusting God

during their wilderness wandering, and that each of us ultimately fall prey to in our faith journeys as we put other things in the way of our relationship with God. Lent is about drawing closer to God and drawing near to Jesus on His journey to the cross. It is about setting aside things which we perceive as being of more importance than church, more vital to our life than being in relationship with God and one another, more necessary than drawing closer to God through education and worship. Lent is about recognizing those temptations, seeking repentance, and finding that same Spirit which filled Jesus and gave Him the confidence and power to say no. Where is the love? The love is in the good news God saw then and sees now the relentless anguish and hostility humanity encounters on a daily basis because of the forces of this world. We need not leave here today in fear that we have to be perfect like Jesus. We need not wake up tomorrow in a cold sweat with a sense that we are alone because we aren't. The love and good news is that Jesus has gone into the wilderness ahead of us and withstood the enemy on our behalf. The love and good news is that God's Spirit continues to lead us, comfort us, and strengthen us during our wilderness experiences. The love and good news is that God continues to call out to us, forgive us and bind us in the grace of God revealed in God's Son to which we were joined in our baptism. The love and good news is found at the end of this forty day journey we embark on each Lent and finish in the agony, suffering, and death of Good Friday and then gloriously see the empty grave and

resurrected Christ on Easter morning. Let us be filled and sustained with God's Spirit for the journey ahead. Amen.