

Luke 4:1-13, Year C  
1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent  
March 10, 2019

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

“You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” These are the words Jesus heard just verses earlier in Chapter 3 after he was baptized and had received the Holy Spirit. They are words we heard last week as he was transfigured before 3 of the disciples into a radiant glow of white the likes of which had never been seen and reunited with faithful men of God from the past, Moses and Elijah. Jesus’ identity has been made known. He is God’ beloved Son.

With that said, Jesus immediately found himself smack dab in the middle of the wilderness for 40 days. Alone. With nothing to eat. Tempted by the devil. There is much at stake in this text. Yet again, this passage connects Jesus with the past. Recall Moses was on the mountain 40 days with no food or water prior to receiving the Commandments. Elijah, too, spent 40 days in the wilderness learning how to lead the people of God. The Israelites wandered in the wilderness 40 days prior to a new generation of God’s covenant people being led into the promised land following God’s rescuing them from their slavery in Egypt. And we can’t forget about Noah’s 40 days and nights upon the seas as the heavens opened and rain flooded the earth as God attempted to rid creation of the sin and evil that had corrupted it.

It seems part of this story is to connect Jesus to the past. To make it known that just like the faithful leaders and prophets of yesterday, Jesus too has indeed been sent by God, filled with the Spirit, and in Him God is yet again doing something new in God’s ongoing battle with evil. Jesus is God’s Son. The beloved. Even the devil knows that as the devil’s first temptation begins with these words, “If you are the Son of God...”

At the root of the devil's temptations is the knowledge of who Jesus is and the devil seems intent on turning Jesus from this fact. Moving Jesus away from trusting his Father in heaven and instead trusting the false and empty promises of the devil that seek not the interest of the world in which Jesus came to save but rather seek first his own interests. This text is about the enemy's repeated attempts to steer us from a relationship with our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer and instead into a relationship with the one whose words are but a mirage promising sustenance, power, and safety. The enemy's repeated attempts to steer us clear of the promise made to us in baptism. We are God's beloved children. This is our identity first and foremost.

One important aspect of this text is that as the Son of God living into that reality for Jesus means experiencing and encountering everything it means to live in the flesh. A life following baptism and the promise we are God's beloved children is not equated to a life of prosperity, luxury, fame, and free of danger and temptation. Being a child of God will undoubtedly lead us to finding ourselves at times in the wilderness tempted to turn from the ways of God. To trust we can make the journey of life on our own. To let things of the world separate us from trusting God is all we need, and that God will provide for our needs. The devil entices us with fear and ultimately it is that fear that we aren't enough or don't have enough that separates us from God and sets us on a path in a futile search for more.

This season of Lent is about many things but perhaps it is a season of remembering that we are enough because of our identity as beloved sons and daughters of God. We are enough because God loved us so much that God sent Jesus into the world. To do a new thing. To rescue and redeem it from the snare of Satan that has long separated it from God.

The fear tactics of the devil continue to rear their ugly head in our world today. To turn us away from the way of love and life and rather turn us to the way of hatred and death. One such act of fear and hatred recently reared its ugliness just miles down the road in Iowa City as the exterior walls of the Iowa City Church of the Nazarene were vandalized with

images of hatred and evil. Swastikas and racist language. The reasoning behind such a heinous act is still unknown. Perhaps it was directed at another ministry effort housed in this facility, Iowa City Compassion whose mission statement is, "IC Compassion is a Christ centered organization that engages culturally diverse communities together through hope, opportunities and partnerships. Together we equip people at their point of need to move out of poverty and inspire them to be of service to others." (iccompassion.org) Part of their ministry also is working with refugees and immigrants providing low-cost legal assistance, a food pantry, and other services. Perhaps, fear of the other is what stemmed this act.

Whatever it is, words and actions such as this run counter to our identity as children of God. They run counter to the life Jesus lived in loving all and crossing boundaries to reveal God's presence and love for those whom others feared. The temptation I was faced with this morning was to not talk about this. To pretend it didn't exist. To risk offending someone or the possibility this could in some way put me at danger or our own community of faith. Well, this is part of our baptismal calling and what it means to often find ourselves in the wilderness settings of life with Jesus. Do we succumb to the fear of the enemy or do we follow the way of love Jesus lived?

Jesus, God's beloved Son, came among us, experienced temptation and took upon himself the world's hatred, suffered and died so that we can live and be free from the guilt and shame that comes when we may give into the tempters lies. Because of Jesus, we can return once again into the open and loving arms of the God who created us and all people. Equal. In the image of God. We are sons and daughters of God and as such that means following in the footsteps of love, peace, and reconciliation. It means standing up against acts of hatred, prejudice, and anything that seeks to strip one of his or her identity.

Thus, I invite you to join me Tuesday evening in a prayer vigil at the Iowa City Church of the Nazarene at 7:00 p.m. To go with Jesus into the wilderness and say no to the tempters lies that seek to divide us from God and from our neighbor. If you can't make it, pray. Send a card of

support. And always trust in the promise that you are enough because you are a precious child of God! Amen.