

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Sermon Reflection Notes

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. All three synoptic gospels connect the story back to Old Testament stories. Moses spent forty days on the mountain without food (Exodus 34:28); Elijah spent forty days in flight to the mountain of God (I Kings 19:478); and Israel spent forty years of struggle in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 8). Forty days and forty nights is Bible speak for "more time than you'd think you need." While each version of Jesus in the wilderness is similar in the synoptics, each writer has a unique way to tell the story. And because the story is recounted three times, there is some significance to it. Sometimes we hear that this story is about Jesus facing temptation by quoting the scriptures. It's implied in that statement that if we only knew the scriptures the way Jesus did, we too would be able to face temptation by responding with the word of God. Paston Ron said he just doesn't buy that. Instead, he pointed out that this scripture passage isn't about us; it's about Jesus being manipulated and tested. Being committed to the way of God in the world does not exempt us from the struggle. It didn't even exempt Jesus.

Views about Satan (the devil) have not always run along the lines of a guy in red with a pointed tail and pitchfork. 'Satan' is best translated as the accuser. We could liken Satan to a prosecuting attorney, one who accuses people of having faith only because life is good. Or, one who tests others and asks, 'how strong is your faith?' By the time Luke's gospel was written, the devil was a more malevolent character, out to deceive, to trick. His sneaky voice of seduction offered Jesus a lot of alternatives; his intent was to get Jesus to give up his identity, to abandon his vocation, to forsake his calling for the temptation of being self-sufficient. The devil tempted Jesus to find power and glory in the world and forget his true character, his true self.

We all hear that seductive voice, and it asks us the same question: Do you trust in God, or would you rather be independent? It's very difficult to resist that devilish call because the temptation presented often seems to be something good, maybe even something holy. Imagine the good God could do if the church had more influence, more power. The temptation is to showcase our own self-importance, to show our self-sufficiency. And like Adam and Eve, we can't resist. We don't pass the test.

It's nice to think that quoting scripture will 'protect' us, but this passage is a reminder that the devil can use scripture for his own purposes too. Quoting a scripture doesn't make us any more right than it made the devil right. Instead, this scripture passage is a reminder that Jesus has already combatted evil, Jesus has done what we can never do, Jesus has passed the test for us. The call is for us to trust in God. To know that our identity is not in what we do for a living, how we vote, how much money we make, or how much influence we yield. We are baptized followers of Jesus, beloved children of God. That is our identity. We don't stand a chance on our own against the devil or the evils of this world. Our only hope is to root ourselves in the amazing grace of God---which passes the test every time.

Scripture

Luke 4:1-13 (NRSVUE)

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tested by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over he was famished. ³The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." ⁴Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

⁵Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And the devil said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."

⁸Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

⁹Then the devil led him to Jerusalem and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' ¹¹and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

¹²Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ¹³When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Discussion Questions

1. The season of Lent is 40 days (*without counting Sundays because we need to remember the resurrection at least once a week to make it through*). What's the significance of '40 days' or the number 40 in the Bible?
2. We don't hear a lot of sermons about the devil in the United Methodist church. What's your experience with sermons about Satan or the devil? Did you hear anything different in this sermon?
3. Jesus was tempted to provide bread to feed the world, to preside over all kingdoms of the world, and to demonstrate miraculous powers so others would follow him. The devil knew all those temptations could be used by Jesus for good. And yet, Jesus resisted. What kinds of temptations might appear to us to be 'good' or even 'holy'?
4. How do we tell when we are being tempted? What's the self-check?
5. What are the practices of Lent that anchor us in our identity as children of God?

Closing Prayer

We have begun, once more, a Lenten Journey. It is a journey that is awkward for us and sometimes we do not know what to do with it. And yet, we are jarred into alertness, and we are invited to consider our identity as followers of Jesus. We pray, in this season of Lent, that we will consider the covenant promise we have made with you and with each other. Help us to take full stock of the power of evil still among us. Search us, O God, and know our hearts. Help us ask if our hearts hold any wickedness, strife, pride, any transgressions that may be hidden from our eyes. Enter the deep places of our life and reclaim us to the path eternal, to everlasting life with You. In this season, wrench us away from our self-sufficiency to the miracle of Easter joy. We pray in the name of Jesus, who, despite his temptations, remained faithful to you. Amen.

"Stay rooted in the amazing grace of God."