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St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church
1st Sunday in Lent/Year C
March 10, 2019
Text: Luke 4:1-13

“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, abides under the shadow of the Almighty. He shall say to the Lord, “You are my refuge and stronghold, my God in whom I put my trust.” Amen.

Scorching dry air. Wild animals. Not another soul in sight. Jesus was beyond being parched and he was starved. The only taste in his mouth was the taste of grit. This was his wilderness experience. It was all beyond his imagining.

Things were certainly different since the moment he took in air after being submerged in the River Jordan at his baptism.

His mind played the scene over and over again: his breaking forth from beneath the surface of the water and into the sunlight. The heavens opening up and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. And the voice. He heard the voice from heaven which said, *“You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”*

Life would be different. It would be powerful. Amazing. Exhausting. Life giving. No, things would not be the same. He was the beloved Son of God! Surely that meant power and glory, and liberation for his people. But not just yet. Instead, Jesus was led, no driven, out into the wilderness. A place of hunger and thirst. A place of danger, vulnerability and fear. A place of being alone but not totally because God was there.

For forty days Jesus prayed and fasted, prayed and fasted, and prayed and fasted some more. That is a long time in Biblical terms; the number forty. A familiar number. For forty days and forty nights it rained upon the earth. And for forty days Noah and his immediate family were holed up in the ark. For forty years Moses and the Hebrew children wandered in the desert. For forty days and forty nights Moses fasted before receiving the tablets on which were written the Ten Commandments. The list goes on. For forty days Jesus endured his wilderness experience alone but not totally because God was there. And the devil was there too.

The Beloved Son of God had put up with the elements and wild beasts, and a parched throat and an empty stomach, and with no human touch or voice to comfort him. The devil began to get busy putting a bug in Jesus' ear tempting him. Testing him to see how strong he really was. Making offers that really were not his to make in the first place.

The devil caught Jesus at his lowest. Yes, Jesus was hungry. And who wouldn't want power and glory? Who wouldn't want assurance? But the devil could not seduce Jesus with bread nor power nor a safety harness because Jesus knew who and whose he was. Yes, there could have been other things the devil offered him; beauty, wealth, fame, security, a healthy 401k, great retirement benefits, things we envision for ourselves. But not at the price of selling his soul to the devil. Jesus remembered he was God's Son, the Beloved. The voice at his baptism affirmed it. His trust and belief in God confirmed it. No twisting of Scripture would get in the way of his relationship with God. Not that day or any other.

Luke tells us "*When the devil had finished every test, he departed from (Jesus) until an opportune time.*" Throughout each Gospel we can find several instances where the tempter was busy. 'Give us a sign, Jesus so that we can believe in you. Make more bread (John 6:26, 30-31).' 'Surely Jesus, all this rejection and talk of death cannot happen to you (Mark 8:31-33).' "Let this cup pass from me..." (Mt. 26:39b). "Aha, you who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" (Mark 15:29-30). The Word made flesh, God made man, Jesus who was both human and divine, was tempted in every way just like us yet did not sin.

It is the First Sunday in Lent.

And we are called to make our own personal trip into the wilderness to discover once again who we are and whose we are. To enter more deeply into our relationship with God. It is during this holy season that we are to re-evaluate our lives, to remember and to hear and to trust and believe that we too, are God's beloved. To believe in earnest and sing with faith the words of the psalmist, "*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, abides under the shadow of the Almighty. He shall say to the Lord, "You are my refuge and stronghold, my God in whom I put my trust."*"

If there is any urgency at all in what we are called to in these times in which we live, it is NOW.

Sisters and brothers, the devil, like death, does not take a holiday. Now is his “*opportune time.*” The people of God are under assault every day. The enemy, the devil, is still busy and promises us French bread, bagels, sour dough, croissants, white and wheat bread and comfort, power and gain, fame and prestige, and for many, a free and uninterrupted ride through life. Some of these things and more can be useful and good and needed in some measure by ourselves and others but at what price? We are tested and tempted and seduced at every turn. Tempted to polish off the entire sleeve of Girl Scout Thin Mints in one sitting. Tempted to turn a blind eye or deaf ear and not get involved in situations that really matter because, ‘well, that’s not our problem!’ Tempted to say everything that comes to our minds or we keep our mouths shut when we should have spoken up. Tempted to take another person for granted. Tempted to stir the pot instead of making peace. Seduced to believe at times that we are less than and beyond all hope.

But like Jesus in today’s Gospel, this is *our* opportune time! We are given the grace and the courage and the Spirit to say: “Uh, uh Satan! No! Not today!” For God promises to provide for our every need. It is God’s kingdom in which we live. It is in God alone that we put our trust. The devil cannot give you what is not his to give! No need to put God to the test.

During this forty days we are invited “in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God’s holy Word (BCP p. 265).”

Lent is often focused on sacrifice, self-denial, and resisting temptation. During the season we may feel compelled to give up things like red meat and desserts, television or social media. Or we may take on a discipline like getting up fifteen minutes earlier each day and saying Morning Prayer or availing ourselves to other spiritual practices. We may start putting aside articles of clothing each day which will then be given to a shelter or collecting can goods for T.E.A.M. or some other food pantry. We may add coins to a box to provide a pair of shoes for a needy child. All those things are well and good. They really are!

But what is most important during our walk in the wilderness is that like Jesus, we make better our relationship with God. That we come to realize that God is all we need. To trust God to be God. To believe and say with all our heart, mind and soul, “*You (O God) are my refuge and stronghold, my God in whom I put my trust.*”

To remind ourselves and each other that God will and does love us even in those times we forget to love God back. God will and does loves us even when we fall short. God does and will keep on loving us *no matter what* because we are each precious in God's sight. We are God's beloved. Say it with me: WE ARE GOD'S BELOVED. Turn to your neighbor and say: WE ARE GOD'S BELOVED. Point to yourself and say: I AM GOD'S BELOVED.

Forty days is a long time. But remember that in the wilderness we do not walk alone. Jesus has been there before and he journeys with us again to the cross where he poured out his love for us, and into the joy of Easter and beyond.

Amen.