

## NORTH MAIN SERMON FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

### Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted<sup>[a]</sup> by the devil. <sup>2</sup> After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'<sup>[b]</sup>" <sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. <sup>6</sup> "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'<sup>[c]</sup>" <sup>7</sup> Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'<sup>[d]</sup>" <sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. <sup>9</sup> "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'<sup>[e]</sup>" <sup>11</sup> Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

### Mark 1:12-13

<sup>12</sup> At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness,<sup>13</sup> and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted<sup>[a]</sup> by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

### Luke 4:1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, <sup>2</sup> where for forty days he was tempted<sup>[a]</sup> by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'<sup>[b]</sup>" <sup>5</sup> The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. <sup>6</sup> And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. <sup>7</sup> If you worship me, it will all be yours."

<sup>8</sup> Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'<sup>[c]</sup>" <sup>9</sup> The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. <sup>10</sup> For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; <sup>11</sup> they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'<sup>[d]</sup>" <sup>12</sup> Jesus answered, "It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'<sup>[e]</sup>" <sup>13</sup> When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

#### THE WORD OF GOD.

The season of Lent is here and we would be remiss if we avoided the most beautiful summary of the upcoming Spring Season.. Song of Songs 2:10-12 My beloved spoke and said to me, "Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, come with me. See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone.

<sup>12</sup> Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land.

It may not actually be Spring but truly The season of Lent is here again and, as with so many times before, we find that we are not really ready for this journey of discipleship, even if we are ready for Spring. So many things claim our lives and prevent us from being ready to take the steps in faith that the Lenten Season calls for us to do. Now we are challenged by Christ to take a journey of discipleship. Christ will help lift our hearts and spirits and direct our paths. Over Two thousand years ago, a man from Galilee said, "What would it profit a man if he gained the whole world and lost his soul? There is something so very curious about this man from Galilee. He has captivated the imaginations of people throughout twenty centuries. He transcends time and place, culture and custom, race and language. Something there is in Him that always speaks clearly to us.

While He is the answer to all our struggles, in our Gospel readings, we see Him struggling with the things He faced. And, as He finds the way for Himself, He finds the way for us as well. We see this truth at the very beginning of His ministry. After He was baptized, "Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Aside from His crucifixion, this was probably the most critical experience in Jesus' entire human life. Jesus was tempted by the wrong use of power. Jesus was

tempted by the wrong way to popularity. : Jesus was tempted by the wrong kind of partnership.

The wilderness that Jesus was driven into was not a very pleasant place. It was more like a desert, a barren place with very little water or vegetation. A harsh climate. Dangers lurking everywhere. It was definitely not somewhere that most people *wanted* to go. Not for any length of time, at least. But Jesus went there, and spent forty long days there. He went into the wilderness, after he was baptized by John, to fast, and to be tested by Satan. The people of Israel did not pass the tests of the wilderness. They complained against God. They forgot how God had provided for them. Jesus now faces each of these temptations. He is hungry, and the devil says, "Turn these stones into bread." This is the temptation to satisfy our immediate needs at the cost of betraying God. Jesus responds with Moses' words. "A person does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.

The devil puts Jesus on a high tower and tempts him to flaunt his power, to rely on his own strength to deliver himself.

Jesus responds with Moses' words, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

Finally, the devil shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, "worship me, and you can have all of these." Jesus responded with Moses' words, again, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him." How was Jesus able to be strong during this temptation? Because he knew who he was. The voice echoed through his ears, "You are my Son, my beloved, in you I am well pleased.", As Jesus leaves the wilderness, it seems Jesus basically started his new job. .

We need to learn about facing our own wilderness experiences. We need to learn to look at the wilderness not just as a harsh, dry place half a world away, but also as a way to describe experiences that we have all the time. Whenever something happens to us that throws us off-balance, spiritually speaking, we end up in what might very well be called the wilderness, in a spiritual wilderness. It might be pretty much anything in our everyday life that has affected us in ways we never could have imagined. We can call all of these different "wilderness experiences." And we all know that these experiences can often be lonely, and even times when God can feel very distant from us. These wilderness

experiences are challenging, and can even tempt us to turn from God, and find another way to deal with our pain. But they can also be times, when we approach them faithfully, that can deepen our faith. They can draw us closer to God, and change us in ways that are good, even if the experience was unwelcome.

We all have these wilderness experiences. The thing that we in our area think of as the wilderness, is not like the one Jesus was driven into. We think of a lush forest of beautiful trees and streams.. but this one was not like that at all. The Spirit *drove* Jesus into the wilderness. He was *thrown out* into the wilderness, if we are to take Mark's language literally. Even Jesus, in other words, didn't *willingly* go into the wilderness. He didn't simply *decide* to spend some time by himself, after his baptism, in order to prepare for his public ministry. No. The Spirit *drove* Jesus into the wilderness. Isn't that often the nature of wilderness experiences? We don't always choose them. Sometimes we do choose them, of course. When you think about it, Lent is really a season when we choose to enter into a wilderness, a time of fasting, praying, and re-examining our lives of faith. A pilgrimage can be an intentional time in the wilderness. But they are not **Always Welcome, or Entered into Willingly. Often times** we are *thrown* into them. An unexpected illness or surgery. But here's the thing about these wilderness experiences. Whether we choose them or not, we can trust that God is going to be with us in them, and that they can deepen our lives of faith, if we approach them with an openness to going through them with God. All wilderness experiences contain within them an invitation to a deeper faith. They challenge us to rely on God more. God is with us in our wilderness, every single time. Of that, we can be assumed and have no doubt.

We are not left on our own. And every wilderness experience, chosen or not, invites us to deepen our faith and trust in this promise. These experiences *invite* us to deepen our faith. They don't *require* us to. Remember the wilderness experience that God's people faced, when they journeyed from Egypt to the promised land? God led them through that wilderness. Cared for them. Sent them daily manna. Showed them where to find water. Protected them from enemies. And, on their good days, God's people trusted God, and trusted the leader that God raised up for them, Moses. But they also had many occasions when they didn't trust. When they complained, or tried to take matters into their own hands. Wilderness experiences are difficult. Often unpleasant. They

challenge us. We, too, can find ourselves complaining. We, too, can want to take matters into our own hands. What happened to God's people when they did those things? Well, it wasn't always good. There were often negative consequences for their actions, before there was forgiveness. But God didn't give up on them, and God doesn't give up on us, either. Wilderness experiences can open our eyes to all the miraculous ways that God is present in our midst. Eventually, of course, wilderness experiences end. God's people arrived in the promised land. Noah and his family finally left the ark. Jesus left the wilderness in today's gospel reading. What then? we can learn from Jesus and scripture about these wilderness experiences. When we journey through them faithfully, we always leave them with a renewed sense of purpose. We see that in today's gospel reading. Jesus left the wilderness, came to Galilee, and began proclaiming the good news of God, saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news. His public ministry has now begun. His time in the wilderness is over, and now he is entering a new phase of his life, his public ministry on this earth. And that is true for us, too. We leave our wilderness experiences changed by them. Hopefully in positive ways. With our faith, our trust in God, deepened. With our perspective on life changed. With our priorities re-arranged and all we have to do is ask if we are going to let this wilderness experience change us? No matter what that experience is.

Today, of course, is the First Sunday of Lent. And this begins an intentional wilderness time for us. We may not have to answer the same temptations Jesus did like turning stones into bread or any other temptations he faced, but when temptations come our way; if we will pause and classify the temptations, identify them with one of the three temptations Jesus faced; we will be better equipped to face them. Every year, on this first Sunday of Lent, we hear again the story of Jesus spending 40 days in the wilderness and this is to remind us that Lent is a time when God invites us to enter voluntarily into the wilderness. With Jesus as our model and our guide, we can do this because we have Jesus as our guide and Jesus was there alone. So, let us journey through this wilderness experience faithfully, and willingly. Let us turn to the disciplines of Lent - fasting and prayer, almsgiving and works of love - with the *confidence* that we are doing so in response to God's call, and with the knowledge that as we do this, we are never alone. To hear the voice of God that

says, "You are my child, my beloved. In you I am well pleased." And then, to be free to love all people, no matter what anyone may say.

Let us pray.. God of us all, as we enter this first week of our Lenten journey, guide us on the path that leads to you. Fill our hearts with gratitude, patience, strength, and peace. Help us to grow closer to you this Lent through prayer, fasting, and charity. Amen