

Irondequoit United church of Christ
THE SERMON – 6 March 2022

“Are You Still In The Wilderness?”

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Here we at the beginning of our Lenten Journey, A Journey with God, A Journey with a man called Jesus, A Journey with ourselves. But who are we and where are we on this journey since we have taken this journey before, haven't we?

Our scripture today is a most familiar one. It is found in three of the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke and it is usually used at this time as we begin our Lenten Season to remind us that even Jesus went through a period of being tempted by evil. The number 40 appears many times within the Bible and here we have it again in these three Gospels that share about Jesus being tempted by the devil.

And how many days is the period of Lent? Yes, those 40 days started this past Wednesday with the imposition of ashes to remind us of our humanity, reminding us that we are a part of God's creation, and most importantly that Jesus was also human and had to go through temptation and suffering like we who live here on the face of this earth. My Grandmother Henderson was a devout Roman Catholic so on Ash Wednesday she not only went to 7:30a.m. mass to receive her ashes but then she fasted for the entire day and at the end of the day it was fish, in fact throughout the year it was always fish on Friday. Even though my parents were not Roman Catholic we also had fish on Fridays when I was growing up and I really disliked the taste of fish at that time, so if we went out to eat, I had shrimp in a basket.

Lent was a time of ritual, a time set aside for penitence, a time to give things up; the question at school was: “What are you giving up for Lent?” To which I would reply: “I'm a Methodist, I don't have to give anything up.” Regina Kedzierski, my girlfriend at the time would then reply: “But you are going out with me so you should give up something?” Pressure! The giving into what others want, others expect from you, challenging your faith tradition. Here I am 14 years old and I'm being challenged, my pastor telling me to put things on during Lent – a greater understanding of Jesus the Christ, reaching out to others asking their forgiveness if you have wronged them, giving to those less fortunate through little coin folders, etc. Then your RC friends telling you that you have to give up something...like chocolate? A small predicament as a teen compared to that of Jesus but those challenges grow in size throughout the years as we become older and the decisions more complex because they may have profound consequences on your life or on those around you.

Luke reminds us at the very beginning of today's passage that Jesus was full of the Holy

Spirit and that it was that Spirit that led him into the wilderness. This should be a reminder for us all that it is extremely important for us to allow God's Spirit to guide us, especially when confronted by major decisions in our lives.

Let us observe the temptations that Satan presents to Jesus:

1. The first temptation following his fasting was with regard to food the nourishment of the body. Most of us have never had to without food for an extended period of time. We even find it difficult to go without food in preparation for a surgical procedure or if we are too sick to eat; but, we do know that there is food there for us to eat. On the other hand, many of us older folks have had to make the decision as to what profession we would follow. For some that was easier than for others; my sympathy goes out to our young people today because it seems that decisions with regard to vocations are more difficult because technology is changing so rapidly that the direction they have chosen to follow may be obsolete by the time they finish training.

How does one choose how they are going to put food on the table? Jesus responds: "One does not live by bread alone." A few years ago we heard about "burn out". This or that profession has a large amount of "burn out". Why? This may sound unsympathetic on my part but perhaps the decision to enter the career was not made with regard to the guidance of God's spirit. I looked up on line and Forbes list of the three highest rates for burnout and they are: Medicine (doctors), Law, and Science/Technology. Some of the cause for burnout may be because of overwork and poor working conditions but many times it is because it was the wrong decision. Jesus' words resound. My father, who was a professional photographer for Sylvania Electric once told me: What ever you do, make sure that you can use your God given talents. No matter how hungry we are we must allow God's Spirit to guide us since we will not always be in the wilderness.

2. The second temptation is that of power in exchange for the adoration of evil. There are many times we want to be the one in control; control of the situation, control of those around us. When we come up with an idea and think that it they way things should be carried out, we naturally want others to go along with our plans and sometimes we become involved in a power struggle when someone, or something challenges our decision. We want the control even if we have to sell ourselves out. We want the power but at what cost? Do I allow God to guide me, or do I want to control God. We see examples of this throughout the world today and many of the struggles for power and the embattlements that are prevalent, especially that in the Ukraine, in Africa, in India, and other places throughout the world. The first commandment is Jesus' response: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.' If we personally want to move beyond our present condition of turmoil and chaos, and have the ability to move out of the wilderness we may personally find

ourselves we must turn to God to guide us in our decision making. Turning the power over to God may allow us to find new insights into the solutions of life.

3. The third challenge is control. Often in life we attempt to manipulate God. Jesus was tempted to show that God would save him from death, this temptation was not just put forth here at this time but also reoccurs when he is in the Garden of Gethsemane but each time he allows God to be in control. If we are honest with ourselves there are times in which we attempt to control God rather than allowing him to be in control. We, like Jesus, need to more confident in God; we need to expand our faith so that we have the courage to walk out of the wilderness of life.

As I was writing this sermon three words came in mind, three words that I believe refer to the challenges that were presented in the wilderness and also challenge us today. These three words are in the recognition of God as being:

1. Omniscient (all knowing)
2. Omnipotent (All powerful)
3. Omnipresent (always there)

We, like Jesus, are always being challenged, society and by factors around us, and we too have a choice – will we allow God's Spirit to lead us out of the wilderness or will we succumb to temptation?