

1st Sunday in Lent (Year C)

Luke 4:1-13

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

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, 'To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.' Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."'

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you", and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."' Jesus answered him, 'It is said, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."' When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Bilbo Baggins loved his friends. He loved his Hobbit hole under the hill at Bag End. He loved his garden. He loved his handkerchief and his grandmother's doilies. He loved his breakfast (and second breakfast, and brunch, and lunch, and tea time, and dinner and supper). And he loved nothing more than a nice pipe on his front porch after a long days work.

These things surrounded Bilbo. They comforted him. They defined him (for better or for worse).

And then he was called into the wilderness.

In the wilderness, there was no Hobbit hole under the hill. There was no garden. He lost his handkerchief and was forced to leave behind his beloved doilies. In the wilderness, he was lucky if he got one meal a day (let alone the other 6 that he was accustomed to). The days that he could have a nice quiet pipe were certainly outnumbered by that days that no such luxury was afforded.

In the wilderness, there were wild things. Dangerous things. Things that tested him in the most vicious of ways.

Without his comforts to define him, without the garden and the handkerchief and the doilies and the pipes to tell him who he should be, Bilbo's wilderness taught him who he *really* was - a small but significant person of surprising courage and strength.

It's funny how wildernesses do that - they strip away other things and reveal who we really are. Who knows, perhaps J.R.R. Tolkien had the season of Lent in mind when he wrote *The Hobbit*. After all, *The Hobbit* is the story of a long and arduous journey with a resurrection at the ending.

That's Lent. That's what we do this time every year. We prepare and make room the resurrection that was, and is, and is to come.

Now, for better or for worse, the first step in our preparations for resurrection is to follow Jesus into his journey of temptation at the hands of the devil.

We would like it, I would guess, if Lent began every year by slowly transitioning us into the waters of the wilderness, like carefully dipping a toe in a cold pool before slowly submerging ourselves. Instead, thanks to the revised common lectionary, each year we begin Lent by being dunked headfirst into the chilly waters of the wilderness by standing with Jesus at his temptation.

It must have been a torturous forty days. At least Bilbo had some sort of food and companionship in *his* wilderness; Jesus had none of these. Still wet from the waters of his baptism, Jesus is driven into the wilderness by the same Spirit that so recently blessed him with God's protection in the waters of the Jordan River.

Jesus must have had a lot of time to think in that wilderness, in between temptations from the devil. Without food or water or companionship to take his mind off of things, I wonder what he did think about during this forty day period of trial and tribulation.

Perhaps he thought about the forty days Moses spent on Mt. Sinai without food or water, meticulously carving the commandments of God into the stone tablets.

Perhaps he thought about the forty days Elijah spent on the run from the death threats of King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel.

Perhaps he thought about the forty days Noah and his family spent on that cramped lifeboat escaping the waters of the flood.

Or perhaps Jesus thought about the forty *years* that the Israelites spent in the wilderness waiting for that promised land of milk and honey.

No matter what Jesus thought about, I'm sure that Jesus had a lot of time to think about who he was and who God was calling him to be.

To each of the devil's temptations, Jesus responded with scripture. And the way that Jesus used scripture was ingenious. You know, scripture is something that accompanies us in wildernesses of all kinds. And Jesus knew that. He used scripture to remind himself of who he was and who God was calling him to be.

The wilderness of Lent is a time that we are reminded of who we are. Lent is a time for simplicity in order to strip away as many things as possible that compete to tell us who we are.

Without food and water, Jesus was reminded that his role was that of a child of God relying on God's providence to see him through this period of trial and tribulation.

Now, here, we must take care not to romanticize the notion of fasting from things. There are, after all, many people for whom the lack of food and water is not an optional spiritual practice but a forced realistic experience of life and death. Consider the people who come to Maureen's Haven in order to find

shelter, food, and water. We must not place ourselves in a liturgical practice that romanticizes the daily struggles of people who are forced to live without basic necessities.

Instead, one of the ways to look at today's passage is that it encourages us to ponder the ways that scripture tells us who we are. Therefore, I'd like to share with you the liturgical practice that I am taking on for the season of Lent. I am making room for scripture. I am pushing myself to spend an extra 15 minutes every day in daily devotion to scripture. To make room for this, I might give up a number of things. For example, one day this Lent, I might spend a little less time watching TV and a little more time meditating on scripture. Another day this Lent, I might ponder scripture a little more while I take my dog, Elsie, for a walk (when it's not 0 degrees outside, that is!). Yet another day, I might choose to spend a little less time playing the blues on my Fender Stratocaster in order that I might read a portion of the bible that I'm not so familiar with.

You see, when we are in wildernesses of any kind, there are things that we have to give up. However, scripture should never be one of those things. Jesus knew this because he used scripture to strengthen him through his temptations.

Jesus did not have food or water, but he did have the Book of Exodus to remind him that the Israelites underwent periods of scarcity and were nevertheless blessed by God's abundance.

Jesus did not have companionship, but he did have the Psalms to remind him that God went with him through every trial and tribulation.

Jesus did not have the comforts of shelter or a warm bed, but he did have the word of Jeremiah to remind him that he was chosen before he was even born to do what God was calling him to do.

Today's text is an invitation for us to ponder the scriptures that strengthen us in times of tribulation. What are those words of scripture that strengthen you when you are being tested? What are the words of comfort that instill God's presence within you when God feels distant?

This is why scripture is so important; it is the lens through which we see God and encounter God and spend time with God. In the wilderness of Lent, we are invited to join Christ in his simplicity and to find out who we *really* are.

Simplicity makes room for other discoveries to be made. Through the difficult but blessed simplicity of Jesus' time in the wilderness, Jesus discovered who he truly was.

Instead of giving in to the devil's temptation to turn a stone into bread, scripture reminded Jesus that he was someone who was called to radically trust God in every situation for life!

Instead of giving in to the devil's temptation to worship him, scripture reminded Jesus that he was someone who was called to worship God and God alone.

Instead of giving in to the devil's temptation to cast himself from that high peak to test God's providence, scripture reminded Jesus that no test was necessary to trust in God's protection.

I would like to propose a helpful practice for all of us to do this week: take 20 or 30 minutes and sit down with your bible and make a list of the scriptures that remind you of who you are! Take some time to do this and meditate on who God is calling you to be as we follow Jesus to the cross and to resurrection. Now, as we mentioned earlier, we are a busy people who, even during the bleakness and

emptiness of this wintry season, feel pulled in every direction possible. Therefore, such a spiritual practice as this might just mean that you have to push something aside in order to make room to meditate on scripture.

But if you force a little simplicity into your life in order to meditate on scripture in this Lenten wilderness, you might find out a little more about who you are and what God is calling you do to.

Bilbo Baggins had one incredible journey. And you know what he discovered when he got out of the wilderness and returned to his cozy little home with all of its comforts and conveniences? Bilbo discovered that he didn't need his cozy little home with all of its comforts and conveniences to tell him who he was. His handkerchiefs and doilies and garden and evening pipes did not define him. What defined him was the courage and strength he found in the wilderness. And the truth is, he had that courage and strength all along; he just needed the wilderness in order to discover it.

My prayer is that the wilderness of Lent will do the same to us. As we follow Jesus in his journey to the cross, I pray that this season of Lent would inspire us to push away the things that compete to tell us who we are. Instead, I hope that we make room to discover scripture's blessings in difficult times. I hope that we discover who we are, so that when we arrive at the empty tomb, we might be open to who God is calling us to be.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.