

The Temptation of Jesus

Jesus, immediately after his baptism but prior to beginning his earthly ministry, is led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit where, for 40 days, he's tempted by Satan

- Matthew and Luke use the verb "led" but Mark, probably more accurately, uses the word *ekballei* which, in Greek, means "to drive"; the same word used when Jesus drives out demons from the possessed

- so: Jesus is *driven* by the Spirit or, in other words, by God

- which means, effectively, that when Jesus goes into the wilderness he does so because he has no other choice

- either way, led or driven, he's there forty days

 - we maybe shouldn't take this number literally

 - "40", in Hebrew numerology, is a significant number, symbolizing completeness or totality, as in the 40 years the Israelites wandered the wilderness following Moses

- the point is this: Jesus, amidst deprivation of mind, spirit, and body, will be tempted...a long time...and in the process, asked to choose between obedience to himself or obedience to God

 - he will be asked, where, Jesus, is your first allegiance?

We should remind ourselves that wilderness in Palestine is not like wilderness in Colorado

- wilderness in Palestine is not an idyllic place of forests and mountains and meadows and streams teeming with food, water, and cool breezes

- wilderness there is *desert*: rocky, desolate, barren desert...brain-baking hot by day, bone-rattling cold by night...devoid of water, devoid of food, devoid of shelter

- and wilderness there is not defined merely in ecological terms...it's defined psychologically as well

 - to the Jewish mind, wilderness is where the wild things are...not bears and mountain lions but demons and evil spirits...it is a place to be avoided at all costs

Jesus in the wilderness, therefore, was Jesus without food, water, or shelter

- he would be at his weakest and most vulnerable, tormented by all earthly needs as never before yet with no earthly way to meet them

- there was only Satan...the one who, with the snap of his demonic fingers, could provide Jesus with every earthly thing he needed but did not have

So the temptations begin...

- first, commanding stones to become loaves of bread (Luke 4:3-4)
 - a temptation, to be sure, to fill Jesus' aching belly with food, but much more a temptation about all the material things human beings are convinced they must have to live a good life
- second, the promise of all the world's glory (Luke 4:5-8)
 - a temptation about control and fame and wealth, but also a temptation to the false promise that the ultimate goal of human life is feeling good...
 - the false promise of pleasure without suffering
- third, being taken to the top of the temple (Luke 4:9-12)
 - a temptation about church and worship and power, but even more about trusting in the sovereignty and providence of God rather than the wherewithal we think we possess to care for ourselves

To each and every temptation, we know: Jesus, for all his weakness, all his vulnerability, says *no*

- no* because while everything within him no doubt screamed that he put his own needs first, his allegiance, first, was to God

It is often noted that the New Testament begins as does the Old

- creation followed by temptation
- in the Old Testament, creation of the world followed by the temptation of Adam and Eve
- in the New Testament, creation of Jesus followed by the temptation of Jesus...
- the difference, of course, being that unlike Jesus, Adam and Eve, apple in hand, say *yes*
 - their* first allegiance was to themselves
- often we say money is the root of all evil...but it's not...
- the root of all evil, as both Adam and Eve and Jesus remind us, is *hubris*
- hubris* means arrogance, but not just run-of-the-mill, garden-variety arrogance...*hubris* is overbearing, insufferable arrogance
 - what Adam and Eve demonstrated in choosing themselves over God; what Jesus *didn't* demonstrate in choosing God over himself
- Jesus puts his allegiance to God above allegiance to *anything* of this world
- and because Jesus only ever did anything to model for us how *we* are to live, he emerged from the wilderness and into an earthly ministry to show us what, in daily practice, such allegiance looks like
- the values, the ethics, the morals, the priorities, the commitment to forgiveness and grace and healing that define both the Kingdom and how those who would call him Lord and Savior are to live their lives
 - it's a living-out of the Sermon on the Mount