

First United Methodist Church

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In my Bible reading, as I shared last week, I'm currently reading in the gospel of Matthew. As we're approaching Advent and Christmas, this is a great time of year to be reading Matthew or Luke, the gospels that give us the greatest information about the birth of Jesus.

Anyway, in my reading I've been going at a much slower pace, pausing whenever a phrase, word, or moment speaks to me. This past week I noticed something in the story that I hadn't really noticed before. One day I was reading from Matthew 3 about John the Baptist baptizing Jesus. It's a powerful story of Jesus coming to John and asking him (John) to baptize Jesus. At first John is unwilling, after all, he knows who Jesus is and he understands Jesus mission before anyone else does. But Jesus explains it is necessary for John to do this one thing for Jesus, as a part of his "preparing" the way for Jesus. John finally agrees

This is a beautiful and powerful story that concludes with the Spirit of God descending upon John "like a dove" as Matthew's story says. Then there are the beautiful words from God, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." What makes this such a powerful and beautiful moment is that every son, and probably every child, longs to hear those words from their father, or either parent, "This is my child, whom I love; with this child I am well pleased." So, this was where my reading ended.

The next day my reading began with Matthew 4, "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil." Wow, what a turn of events. Jesus seeming to move from a beautiful and intimate moment with God to being alone in the wilderness tempted and tested.

What struck me about the flow of this story is that this is often the way it is in our lives yet today, or at least it is in mine. One moment we're experiencing a close moment with God and feeling really good about our connection with God...and then suddenly we're in a lonely place, wondering if God is anywhere to be found and then being tested or tempted to take short-cuts, or the easy way out, in our faith journey.

As I think about it, this pattern makes sense. When we've experienced a holy moment with God is often when we are most confident in our faith. Sometimes that "confidence" leads to a sense of over confidence, allowing us to think or feel that we've got it made, we've arrived in that place of absolute closeness with God. It's then that Satan often finds a toe-hold, or some place for doubt and uncertainty to creep into our lives. It's then that a misstep is more likely to follow. But Jesus shows us the way to avoid a stumble or misstep - always look first to God's Word. Always look to God's direction, God's way of working in the world and in our lives, rather than what seems easiest for me in the moment.

So, I hope you're all feeling close to God in your faith journey. But if you are, just know that a time of testing is most likely coming along. It's something Jesus dealt with when he walked this earth, and it's something we'll each experience too. Thank goodness Jesus is with us even in the times of trial.

Serving Together,
Pastor Keith

Join us this Sunday for our Gratitude Sunday. Worship is at 10:00 am. **JUST ONE SERVICE!!** There will be multiple opportunities for a "Gratitude Offering"; Can of Fruit for the Food Pantry, Words of thanks and praise, Presenting our offerings and Gratitude Cards for our 2018 Commitments. Rev. Roger Spahr will be preaching. A potluck will follow worship and our Charge Conference gathering will follow the meal. All are welcome!!