

Luke 4: 1-13

¹ Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ² 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. ³ The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." ⁴ Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

⁵ Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ 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.

⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸ Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

⁹ 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, ¹⁰ for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' ¹¹ and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

¹² Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ¹³ When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Romans 10: 8b-13

“The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim);⁹ because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. ¹¹The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. ¹³For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”



Back in 2010, just as I was beginning to work at the Methodist church in downtown Rapid City, I was the youth director. In Sunday school we were working our way through a devotional based on the book “Under the Overpass.” It was about a young man’s journey into being homeless. It was a journey of understanding and of building empathy for and solidarity with those struggling with issues of poverty and homelessness. First United Methodist, where we worshiped and where I worked, had opened the HOPE Center, a day center for those struggling with the issues of poverty and homelessness, so the topic was on all of our minds. As a way to help the students build understanding and empathy and connection to these issues, I decided to do an overnight in a picnic shelter. In February. We met at church and I gave each youth about \$2 – that was the amount then set by the federal government for two meals at the poverty level. We went to the grocery store and the youth and I bought our food for dinner and breakfast and we headed to the picnic shelter.

The HOPE Center director came and shared about the vision and work of the center and a woman who had just come out of homelessness came and shared her story. And then we settled in as best as we could for a long, cold February night. Several did not sleep at all – for a variety of reasons. All of us walked away from that experience changed. We understood something that we had never and probably would never experience personally on a new and much deeper level. We heard and saw and felt in ways that transformed us and our understanding of others. In today's main scripture passage, Jesus is led into the wilderness and is tempted by Satan. For Jesus, this too was a life changing experience. As we prepare to walk with Jesus in the wilderness, let us begin with a word of prayer...

Fresh off baptism and being anointed and filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus is led into the wilderness. As Jesus enters this place, turn with me to Luke 4 as we walk with him this morning. In verse two we read that *"for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days."* Jesus fasted and prayed. Satan came and tested Jesus. In the text for today, we get a glimpse of evil at work. We get a feel for the power of temptation. Both of these things are things that we are personally and intimately familiar with. In our day to day lives we all struggle with the power of temptation.

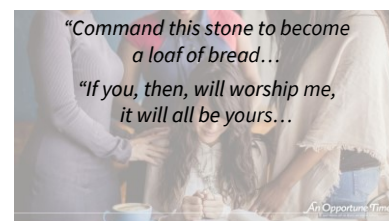
In the letter to the Hebrews, we are reminded that Jesus was *"tempted in every way as we are."* His time in the wilderness allowed Jesus to experience what we experience. Jesus experienced hunger and hurt because we hunger and hurt. Jesus was tempted to cut corners, to take the easy way, to live for self, because we are tempted to do these things.

During his time of temptation, Jesus faced three temptations that the gospel writer focus on. These are temptations that we all face. The first was to “*command this stone to become bread.*” Jesus was famished. To meet that need would have been quite tempting. How often we find ourselves in places of need – or at least in a place of want.



For some it is a physical need, a need for food, for shelter, for warmth. For some it a need for security or safety or acceptance. Satan tempts Jesus to use his power to meet a need – to feed one who is hungry. Later in his ministry, Jesus will use the power of God within him to feed – to feed the crowds, turning a few loaves and fish into meals for thousands and thousands. To feed others, to meet needs is not always a bad thing, but it can be. We can struggle with temptations in this way too. We can tell ourselves that this thing is for good when it really is not. We can convince ourselves to do things that look good but ultimately are harmful to our faith or to our relationships. For example, when someone on the street asks us for some money to buy food and we respond by just giving them money, it is a good thing to do. But it would be a better thing to go and sit down with them, sharing a meal and conversation together.

Jesus responds to this first temptation by quoting scripture, reminding Satan that “*one does not live by bread alone.*” There is much more to life than meeting our physical needs. Satan then takes Jesus to a high place, overlooking all of the kingdoms of the world. Satan offers Jesus the splendor and the glory and the power to rule over all these kingdoms, tempting him by saying, “*If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.*”

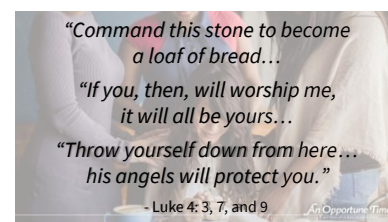


Just bow down and worship Satan and all this can be yours, Jesus. We hear these same lies or half-truths, if you will. While the offer is not as grand as what Jesus is being offered by Satan, for us the offer can still be tempting. Just do this one thing and that promotion will be yours. Just say this one thing and all that pressure will go away. Just act this way and you'll fit in with that crowd. Sometimes the outcome is the temptation, but at other times Satan uses our earthly desires or struggles to fuel the temptation. Our desire for control, our need to be right, our desire for recognition, our desire to get our own way can fuel the lies that Satan whispers into our hearts and minds. For Jesus, the promise of what Satan offered is a promise that Jesus makes to the disciples and to us. One day every knee will bow at the name of Jesus.

Responding to Satan's temptation, Jesus says, *"Worship the Lord, your God, and serve him only."* There is only room for one to sit on the throne of our hearts. When we buy into Satan's lies, when we allow our desires to add fuel to the lies and half-truths, we are placing self on the throne of our hearts.

For the last temptation, Satan takes Jesus to the highest point of the temple. From that death-inducing height, Satan says, *"Throw yourself down from here... his angels will*

protect you." Go ahead Jesus, show us how much God loves you. Prove you really are the beloved of God. And, yes, my friends, we push the limit of this one too. We might not take a high dive off a building to see if God will save us, but we do enter into situations that test God, so to speak. When I choose to do something dangerous or that I know is well outside of what God desires for me, am I not really saying,



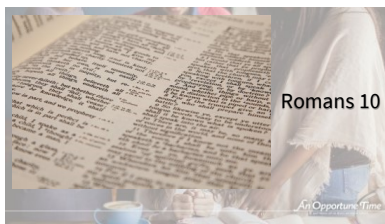
‘Will you still love me when.... God?’ When I pray a bargaining prayer – those ‘if you do this God then I’ll do that’ prayers – am I not testing God? Am I not really telling God, ‘if you loved me you’d do this or that for me?’ Jesus responds to this temptation of Satan by saying, *“Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”* Jesus will trust God and God’s plan and he encourages us to do so as well. At the end of his earthly life, this trust will be demonstrated by Jesus as he endures trial, persecution, abuse, and even death on the cross. In faith we too are called to walk forward, knowing that God has good for us.

The temptations that we face come in all shapes and sizes. They are certainly not limited to the three that Jesus faces in the wilderness. The devil is crafty and is always on the prowl. He is always looking for that next opportune time to drag us down, to tempt us, to help us fall into sin. Some are small tugs – that temptation to have another doughnut before returning to work from break time or to have another drink before leaving the bar or just a little more ice cream before going to bed. Maybe it is the inclination to skip that meeting or class or to sleep in instead of going to be a part of that volunteer project. Maybe it is declining the invitation to this charity event because you’d rather watch the ballgame on television. And sometimes it involves doing the right thing for the wrong reason. Maybe, for example, we do go to that charity event, but we have an awful attitude the whole time, ruining it for those around us.



Wrong priorities can also be a trap us. Whenever we elevate something above our relationship with God, we are entering dangerous waters. It can be many of those things we’ve talked about – the things of this world that we chase after.

Things that appear as good can be dangerous too. Providing for our families, for instance, is a good and right thing. But if it rises above honoring and practicing our faith, then we are on thin ice. Whenever anything gains more of our heart than God, we are more likely to cave when temptation comes our way. This is an opportune time for Satan to go to work on us. Even then we have a choice. In our passage from Luke 4, Jesus kept God as the focus, as the right priority. Jesus invites us to practice that same humble obedience to God's word that kept him from falling to temptation. But Jesus is Jesus, and we are not. We need help. To gain some understanding as to where to get and to give help in our battle against Satan, turn with me to Romans 10, beginning in verse 10.



In Romans 10 Paul is initially speaking of the righteousness that comes through faith. As we begin Lent, this passage is a good reminder of what a Christian believes. The law that

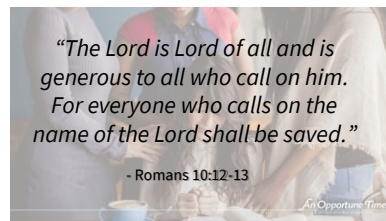
came under Moses did not lead to living a righteous life. Instead, it was used to create a manmade righteousness that always fell short of the glory of God. As we turn to Romans 10, we gain encouragement for those days when we find ourselves in the wilderness. Just as it was for Jesus, we too can draw strength from the word of God that is on our lips and in our heart. For Paul, righteousness came not from something one memorized and then tried really, really hard to keep. Righteousness comes from what is in our hearts. For Paul, belief was foundational. Our character and our integrity, our acts of piety and charity, our bent towards justice and equality, our participation in the community of faith – all of these and more rest upon and are fruits of our convictions about God's grace and unconditional love.

In verse 9 Paul declares, *“If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”*

There is action in this kind of faith. To confess is an action. To believe is an action. Jesus was a man of action. He lived fully engaged in life and in the lives of those he met. Jesus invites us to be fully engaged too. He calls us into relationship with God and into community with one another. The idea of confessing with our lips and believing in our hearts translates into how we practice our faith too. Knowing the word and knowing what we believe is so helpful to us personally as well as when we are living in community with others. Personally knowing the word and what we believe arms us to fend off the attacks of Satan, just as Jesus did in the wilderness. In community, knowing the word and what we believe empowers us to walk alongside another believer who needs support, encouragement, strength, reassurance, and knowledge for their own battles.

For many, the journey of discipleship begins with practice, not with faith. The preacher’s axiom – “preach it until you believe it” – can apply to our walk of faith as well. We have to, at times, practice our faith until we come to believe it. Living in community also provides us opportunity to help others walk the walk, practicing their faith as they work their way towards belief. Sometimes we do the same, walking with others so that they can help us practice and develop our own faith.

For all of us, from the most mature to the newest believer, we need to practice our faith and we need to surround ourselves with community because we are less than Jesus – less focused, less certain, less directed. So, yes, we need help. In verses 12 and 13 we see where our primary help comes from. In these verses we read, *“The Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”* God is generous. God will provide for us when we are tested, when we are in our time of need. God will give us the words to say to defeat the enemy when something tempts us, when we are about to cave in. Paul reminds us that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Everyone.



This text, especially these two verses, are a call to Christian unity and community. When Paul says there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles, he is saying that we all follow the same God, that we are all the same in God’s eyes. This again echoes the call to allow our faith to be the core thing that draws us together.

In the wilderness, when Satan came at Jesus when he was weakest, Jesus called on God and found the scripture needed to thwart Satan’s attack. That power is ours too. When we are hard-pressed, when we feel too weak to continue to stand, we too can call on the name of the Lord and our Jesus will save us from that temptation. We need community to develop this ability to call on Jesus and to be rooted in the word of God. Community is so important to our walk of faith. Our brothers and sisters in Christ keep us on track – both encouraging us when we are down and calling us into account when

we begin to wander. Community helps us to grow in our faith and to mature into people who know the word of God. That is essential because to call on it, we must know it. Reading it, discussing it, understanding it, applying it – that best happens in community.

Lent provides an opportune time to grow in our faith as we participate in the community of faith. That is the idea behind the image for this week's message. It is a picture of a



community of faith surrounding, praying over another believer. It is also a picture of someone receiving what they need from the community of faith. Within the body of Christ we both give and receive.

Those many years ago, my high school Sunday school class chose to take a journey together. We read and learned about the topic of homelessness and the issues surrounding it on Sunday mornings. We chose to go deeper, to experience it and to look into and hear from folks who knew homelessness. The journey changed us, transformed us. Lent invites us on a similar journey. We have a book to read, and we have resources to use on our journey (the Bible and Lenten devotional).

Will we – will you - allow God to lead you on this journey, joining with others in this community of faith to grow and to develop a new and deeper understanding of faith and of self? Lent is a journey of faith, a journey towards becoming more like Jesus. It is an opportune time to deepen your journey and to grow in community. It is my hope and prayer that you will choose to take a journey of faith with us, with this community during this holy season of Lent. May it be so for us all. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. As you look at your moments in the “wilderness” when has God worked most powerfully in your life? How is that story “on your lips” and in your heart?
- 2) *Pray*. Where are you feeling temptation the strongest right now in your life? Pray for discernment and maybe for another believer to walk alongside you.
- 3) *Study*. Read Luke 4:31-37. How is this passage an extension of today’s text? What else does it reveal about Jesus’ power over Satan and other evils in the world?