

**SERMON First Sunday in Lent, March 9th, 2025, Luke 4: 1-13
Emmanuel Lutheran in Lancaster, Pa. Rev. Timothy W. Sadler**

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
Amen.*

Jesus was full on the Holy Spirit of God, and where did that Spirit lead him? Right smack dab in the middle of the wilderness—a place of scarcity, a place so different from our ordinary human lives, that it can cause people to lose hope and to question the very presence of God.

So, what does the Holy Spirit of God have in mind for Jesus? Jesus had just been baptized and declared by God to be God's beloved Son. You would think that would mean a comfortable life with riches, and blessings beyond measure.

But instead, Jesus is led away from plenty to barrenness and want. Is it possible, though, that in the hands of God even the wilderness can be a blessing?

It seems to be part of the human story that all of us will, from time to time, experience the wilderness. The saints have a name for it; they call it the dark night of the soul.

But you don't have to be one of those special saints to experience it. Most ordinary human beings living ordinary lives will be driven out into the wilderness from time to time.

We may not call it a dark night of the soul; we may have other names for it, but nevertheless, a wilderness experience it is. It's a time when we feel lost and can't seem to get a sense of direction.

We can look back on our lives and see where we were, and it all seems so simple now, so easy. But we cannot yet look ahead to where we will be.

The wilderness is a place that disorients us, and it doesn't feel very good to be there. In fact, if we had our way, we'd short circuit the journey and get through it as fast as we could.

The thing is, if we believe God is guiding our journey, then we've got to face the truth that God might have also led us to this place in the wilderness, just like he did Jesus.

I remember reading a devotional by Oswald Chambers and in it he says this:
If our hopes seem to be experiencing disappointment right now, it simply means that they are being purified.

Not every hope we have is of God, and those hopes that are, need to be purified in order to more fully reflect God's will for us. And that only happens in the wilderness.

Sometimes things have to fall apart in our lives so that they can be put back together in a new way. This can also pertain to the church as an institution. It's not a comfortable place to be.

And yet—if our wilderness experience is part of the Divine chaos that brings renewal, then through it we must go... if we want to experience new life.

Jesus had to face this. We think of Jesus being God's Son and just sailing through life. We think, sure, the wilderness experience was easy for Him. But to believe that is to discount His humanity and the suffering Jesus went through because of His humanity.

His struggle in the wilderness was real. Not only did He have the physical challenge of severe hunger, He also had the spiritual challenge of some very real temptations.

Just like a time in the wilderness can make things clearer for us, so they did for Jesus. By wrestling through all the issues the devil raised, Jesus clarified His own mission and made very intentional choices about how He was going to get through this life, how He was going to be the Messiah.

Jesus decided he wasn't going to be a nine-day wonder, and he certainly wasn't going to serve anyone but God.

The end doesn't really justify the means. What Satan was presenting to Jesus was different ways of achieving His goal of being the Messiah and getting people to follow Him, all without suffering.

Jesus made the decision that the only way for Him was God's way, no matter what the cost.

The temptations you and I face, in the wilderness are real. When we are at our weakest, when we are feeling bewildered, it's very tempting to take the easiest way out and so our character is put to the test.

The choices we make in the wilderness will build our character for good or ill.

There's another kind of wilderness experience in this life and that is the experience of deep, deep grief. Death is a part of this life and it's the way this life ends so we get to go Home to Go. And that's a good thing.

But when we lose someone, we love, it doesn't feel good, and we are thrown so far into the wilderness we feel as though we'll never see daylight again.

Our world, as we've known it has changed forever and we're just not sure how we can possibly live it.

Those of us who have gone through these times of loss know that grieving is hard work. It takes its toll on us physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

In these times of being in the darkest places of the wilderness, we've got to believe that God is with us, just like God was with Jesus.

And we've got to trust God will see us through them, and we will come once again to see the blessings of this life.

It is the amazing love of God that gets us through the wilderness and beyond. Wilderness experiences can be an opportunity for powerful spiritual growth, or they can give birth to doubt and despair.

I guess it all depends on how we understand God to be present with us.

This life doesn't really come with guarantees and that's what Satan was offering Jesus. But Jesus—well, Jesus wanted more than anything to do the will of God.

So, for Jesus, it wasn't a question of what Satan wanted, or a future with comfort and guarantees. For Jesus, it was, a question of God's will.

Whether or not Jesus understood what was happening as he went through His wilderness experience, scripture doesn't say.

We only know Jesus faced it head-on and made choices that reflected who He was as God's beloved Son.

Since Jesus was human, it is very possible that it was only after he came through the wilderness that He could fully understand what had taken place and how it had changed Him.

Jesus shows us how to get through times in the wilderness --- with prayer and trust. We keep on going because we trust the God who is with us and who will see us safely through.

We trust the Lord who knows what it means to be in the wilderness and who now helps us get through it too.

Thanks be to God.

Children, Youth, and Young at Heart Story

What Did Jesus Do?

Theme-- How do we defeat Satan? By following Jesus' example.

Object--A WWJD bracelet

Scripture— Luke 4:1-13

At one time a bracelet that said: "WWJD," which stands for "What would Jesus do?" were popular, and today some people are wearing them again. (Invite kids to tell whether they've seen anyone wearing them.) We can use this bracelet as a reminder to be like Jesus.

- So what kinds of things have you known Jesus to do that you could follow?
- Why would one want a reminder like this throughout their days?

- Kids can be tempted to do all kinds of things at school, in their neighborhoods, and even at home...things that aren't God-honoring or what's best for us, right? Well, Jesus knows what it's like to be tempted, too. The Bible tells about a time Jesus went out into the wilderness for 40 days to be by Himself. God's Spirit led Him out there to fast and pray.
- During that time God's enemy, Satan came and tempted Jesus to do some things Jesus knew weren't right. But just because Jesus is God and He's powerful, that doesn't mean the things Satan suggested weren't tempting. Like first, Satan suggested Jesus turn stones into bread that Jesus could eat. (Have kids close their eyes for a moment and imagine what it might be like for them to not eat or drink anything for 40 days, and how that might feel. After a minute, invite them to reflect on their thoughts.)
- Jesus could have easily done what Satan suggested, but He didn't. Instead, He answered, "It is written, 'Man does not live by bread alone.' "
- Then Satan took Jesus up to a high place and showed Him the worldly kingdoms below. He said, "All of this belongs to me. If You will bow down and worship me, I will give it to You."
- Worship can mean "make more important than God"; so what kinds of things are you sometimes tempted to make more important than God?
- Here's what Jesus answered to Satan's temptation: "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.' "
- Next, Satan took Jesus to Jerusalem and led Him up to the highest point on the temple. He said to Jesus, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here. God will send His angels to rescue You." (Lead kids in a vote: Who thinks God could keep Jesus from harm if He did jump off that temple.)
- Of course, God could keep Jesus safe, but Jesus quoted the Scripture, " 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' "
- Do you know what the devil did? He gave up! He said, "I'll come back and try another day."
- The next time the devil tempts you to do something wrong, look in the Bible and see what the Bible says. Then...Do What Jesus Did...answer Satan with Scripture!

Let us pray:

Dear God, help us use Your word and follow Jesus' example in our lives. In Jesus' name, amen.

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