

**Church of All Nations
Luke 4:1-13
March 9, 2025**

Every year in the first Sunday in Lent we have the story of the Temptation of Jesus in the wilderness.

Since the fourth century, Christians have observed the forty week days before Easter as a time for repentance, reflection and self-examination. In the Bible, forty is a number of sacred significance. The Genesis flood lasted "forty days and forty nights." Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Moses spent forty days and nights on Mt. Sinai. Jonah preached to Nineveh for forty days. And Jesus spent forty days in the desert fasting, praying, and battling satan.

Have you been in the wilderness? I have had a couple of experiences of wilderness. They varied in the most extreme way. The desert on two drives to Uluru and Perth across the Nullarbor yet also I experienced the wilderness of a rain forest in Tasmania - that actually got saved in part by the efforts of a organisation called The Wilderness Society. could not get more opposite to the desert but also known as wilderness. Barren dry but also abundant and plentiful. One you can see to the horizon for hundreds and hundreds of kilometres - longest stretch of straight road the other well I recall stepping off the boat that took us up the Franklin and straight into the rain forest and there was a camp, a village of people. Take a few more steps and you are in the thickest impenetrable tangle of growth that you could barely move in.

And the contrast in our experience is true also when we start to use the word "wilderness" as a metaphor for our times of temptation and testing. For something to be a true temptation it has got to be two things - it has to have some appeal for us and it has to be a possibility for us. We can be severely tempted/tested exactly at the point of our weaknesses and vulnerabilities - quick money that will solve our massive financial problems, with just a turn of the eye, a flick of a switch, a click on a keyboard but also in our strengths and achievements - believe the hype, overlook the ones you are crushing, take a shortcut in due process, make a decision on your own that was meant to be a group decision. That why some talk of the Dangerous times of plenty

Wilderness then is used as a metaphor for the way we can experience entering into a period of inner searching with the possible outcomes of emerging stronger or getting lost and losing direction and moral compass

Sooner or later, every one of us will get to take our own wilderness exam, our own trip to the desert to discover who we really are and what our lives are really about. Needless to say, this is not a situation many of us seek. Most of us, in fact, spend a lot of time and money trying to stay out of it; but I don't know anyone who succeeds at that entirely or forever.

I guess that could sound like bad news, but I don't think it is. I think it is good news--because even if no one ever wants to go there, and even if those of us who end up there want out again as soon as possible, (whats that saying, I would never do it again but I would not have it any other way) the wilderness is still one of the most reality-based, spirit-filled, life-changing places a person can be.

When we ask what did that long, famishing stretch in the wilderness do to Jesus? It *freed* him--from all devilish attempts to distract him from his true purpose, from hungry craving for things with no power to give him life, from any illusion he might have had that God would make his choices for him. After forty days in the wilderness, Jesus had not only learned to manage his appetites; he had also learned to trust the Spirit that had led him there to lead him out again, with the kind of clarity and grit he could not have found anywhere else.

Note: Jesus is not tempted because he has departed from God's will. Jesus is in the desert because he was led by the spirit. Luke is quite explicit in telling us Jesus was "full of the Spirit". So being "Full of the Spirit" takes him into the place of emptiness, the wilderness. He is forging some major decisions about what course his life and ministry will take. What does it mean to be declared the beloved Son? What of power and glory and identity and suffering? What sort of Messiah could he not be if he was to remain true to God and himself and his calling?

Wild beasts snap at our heels, and angels clean our wounds. This Lenten path is strange and difficult, and it leads of course to the cross. But this we know: it will be at the point when we imitate Christ, when we finally give up and hand control over to God, when we allow that which we hold so precious about ourselves to be crucified, that the wild beasts will put their tails between their legs and slink away, and the Accuser, Satan, will cringe for he knows he has been defeated by abundant grace. And least for now.

Go now, confessing Christ as Lord, in word and deed.
Worship and serve the Lord your God and no other.
Stand firm in the time of trial;
tell the story of God's goodness,
and trust in the Lord whose saving word is always with you.

And may God instruct angels to guard you wherever you go;
May Christ Jesus be your refuge and stronghold;
And may the Holy Spirit lead you
and put God's Word on your lips and in your hearts.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
In the name of Christ. Amen.

