

Mark 1:12-15

Christ Church, Dallas

February 21, 2021

The Wilderness

As we hear this morning about Jesus being thrust into the wilderness we are learning about the trials of temptation.

In this life of ours it is impossible to escape temptations. We are not sent temptations to make us fail, on the contrary temptations are sent to us to strengthen our nerve and to toughen our minds and hearts and souls.

Temptation is a very real part of life especially when we find our selves in our times of wilderness. Now what do I mean by this? Our wilderness times are when we are down, discouraged, afraid, disappointed and lonely. This is when we are at our most vulnerable.

In our wilderness times we are tempted to stray from our values. We try to rationalize our behavior. And believe me when I say that Satan will provide us with lots of logical excuses! Our challenge then is to stand firm to our convictions and remain true to our values.

In our personal wilderness we are tempted to avoid the pain and struggles of our lives by looking for the easy or softer ways to avoid our difficulties. Our challenge is to walk through the pain and the darkness to persevere and to take the difficult path.

Sometimes in our wilderness times we are tempted to listen to the voices that lead us away from God. Radio, TV and internet can convince us that money, power, security and fame are the good things in life. Now these things are not evil in themselves, but they become evil when they replace God in our lives. We are tempted to believe that all this “stuff” is all we need to be happy and feel better. We begin to believe that if we only had more wealth, more security we will be happy. Forgetting that the challenge in our life is knowing that God will provide everything we need to be happy.

Frequently the biggest temptation we find in our personal wilderness is the temptation just to give up. Paul told the citizens of Corinth “we are pressed on every side by troubles, but not crushed and broken. We are perplexed because we don’t know why things happen as they do, but we don’t give up and quit. We are hunted down, but God never abandons us. We get knocked down, but we get up again and keep going.” Paul certainly understood the temptations of his church.

As we face the temptation to give up we must find the strength in ourselves to persevere in our personal wilderness. We all must rise to meet the challenges head on and do what is right, in being faithful to God, and in loving others as God loves us.

2020 and now 2021 have presented all of us with different types of wilderness. Personal trials surround us and challenge us.

The good news here is that God strengthens us to meet all of the challenges. Jesus knows what it is like to be tempted and He knows what it is like to be challenged. He's been there. And it was in the wilderness, immediately after His Baptism, that Jesus struggled, grieved, doubted and suffered great temptations.

There is always Good News that comes out of the wilderness times in our lives. Each time we are able to meet the challenge in the wilderness it helps prepare us for the next challenge that is to come. We struggle with our temptations in the wilderness and out of that challenge comes character.

I try to think of it this way. At times when our temptations seem hopeless it is possible to see these temptations from a different point of view. I try to imagine what the consequences would be if I gave in to the temptation instead of trying to live through them. That is when the benefit is obvious.

We learn from Jesus that we meet the challenges of our personal wilderness daily by meeting God. Jesus was able to meet the challenges of his wilderness because he was with God the Father each of those 40 days. This is how Jesus knew God's will for his life and it is how we can learn God's will for our lives.

When we meet God daily in prayer and scripture and worship we hear God's voice in the wilderness. And that voice of God prepares us for whatever temptations and challenges might arise in the wilderness of our life.

We can meet every challenge with the help of our Jesus.

Jesus was not left to fight his battle alone – and neither are we.

Amen