

## Sermon Sidebar: March 10, 2019

### The Temptation of Jesus

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell the story of Jesus' baptism, and his subsequent journey into the Judean desert where he fasted for forty days and nights. After being baptized by his cousin, John the Baptist, Jesus withdraws to the wilderness where he hammers out the pattern of his ministry on an anvil of prayer. Notice that the season of Lent is 40 days long (exclusive of Sundays), from Ash Wednesday until Holy Saturday. The number 40 is mentioned over 140 times in Scripture and usually symbolizes a period of testing, trial, or probation. Moses was on Mt. Sinai for 40 days and nights, on two occasions (Exodus 24.18, 34.28). The Israelites spend 40 years wandering in the desert. Jonah had to preach to Nineveh for 40 days, that God was about to punish them for their sins. The prophet Ezekiel had to lay on his right side for 40 days to symbolize Judah's sins (Ezekiel 4.6). And Elijah went 40 days without food or water at Mt. Horeb....just a few examples.

For Jesus in the wilderness, the 40 days are a time of discernment, planning, and temptation. How best to begin his ministry? How shall he proceed? What is God's plan? And how best to get from point A to point B?

Several different times, the devil comes to Jesus and tempts him. The problem isn't Jesus' divinity. He indeed could change anything he wanted, turn stones into bread, summon angels to his side, have a fine meal, manipulate human hearts into following him, whatever. Jesus is divine and the second person of the Trinity - he can do anything. No, the problem is that Jesus is human...with all the temptations and errors that flesh is heir to. How will he proceed? Will he cut corners or be patient? Will he allow people free will or force their obedience? Will he suffer, in order to save? Or will he put himself first and seek to avoid pain and hardship?

Indeed, to be human is to be challenged daily by such considerations.

The devil tempts Jesus with three different things, coming at him from three different angles:

- to turn bread into stones and alleviate his hunger (a kind of self-indulgent hedonism)
- Leap from the pinnacle of the Temple and let angels break his fall (a kind of prideful egotism)
- And kneel before Satan in return for all the kingdoms of the world (a kind of visual materialism)

At each offer of the Tempter, Jesus turns to Scripture to center himself and resist the temptation. He will do God's work, in God's way, according to God's plan. In resisting these temptations (and others that come later), Jesus is the only human being to live his entire life, without sin.

Luke 4.13 says ***When the devil had finished every test, he departed from [Jesus] until an opportune time.*** Indeed, the devil will come back at Jesus time and again throughout his ministry. But each time, Jesus remains true to God and is without sin.

When he is crucified on the cross, Jesus functions as our Passover lamb. Without blemish or sin, Jesus is the perfect lamb of God, who by his sacrifice, is able somehow to take away the sins of the world. What an amazing Savior, this Jesus!

When one accepts Jesus Christ as Lord, one is forgiven of sin, and the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in your heart. With Jesus' and the Holy Spirit's help, you and I can then resist temptation as well.

Have you accepted Jesus as your Lord?