

¹⁶And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the **Spirit** of God descending like a dove **and alighting on him**. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, **the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.**”

Matthew 4:1-11

4Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” ⁴But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” ⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” ⁷Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” ¹¹Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Luke 4:1-13

4Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where 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. ³The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” ⁴Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’” ⁵Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And 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. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” ⁸Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” ⁹Then 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, ¹⁰for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ ¹¹and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” ¹²Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ¹³When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Sermon – March 1, 2020

Being Tested

Today's Gospel tells of Jesus' 40 day test in the wilderness when he encounters the Devil or Tempter

How many of you like tests? Probably none of you. Yet, every one of us has had tests. We've had tests in school. We've had driver's tests and medical tests. Tests are stressful, aren't they? We avoid them if we can.

While living in England for 10 years, I worked to keep my Canadian driver's license up-to-date, to avoid another dreaded driver's test. However, I **did** have to take the British driving test and failed it twice! That was stressful!

While I was at Wycliffe College in Toronto, at the end of term we were given the choice between writing a test or an essay. Most preferred the essay. Students avoided tests if they could.

But tests, even though we don't like them, seem to be part of life. Test results give us information about who we are. So it was for Jesus.

Wet and washed from his river Baptism, Jesus emerged, full of **God's Spirit**. Note Jesus received the Holy Spirit at his Baptism. It was the Holy Spirit which led him into the wild land west of the Jordan River where many went to fast and pray for God's direction. Tradition has it that Jesus climbed into a high cave on Mt. Quarantal, today the location of the Monastery of the Temptation, overlooking the Jordan Valley. This high wilderness place attracted God's seekers for centuries. In caves there, people fast and pray, seeking answers. They still do today.

In the cold, dark cave, Jesus waited and prayed. He was deprived of the comfort of water, food, and warmth. By the end of 40 days, he was famished. We really can't imagine it. Three times God's Adversary, the Tempter came testing Jesus with suggestions.

The Tempter's first proposal

"If you are the Son of God, then prove it... Turn this stone into a loaf of bread.

Second he says Throw yourself off this pinnacle so God can save you.

The third time God's Adversary says "Worship **me** and I will give you all the kingdoms of the world."

How does Jesus face this adversary? Jesus simply points to "The Word of God".

Jesus himself is the Word; the Word made flesh, God **with** us. He has taken on our humanity. He has not come for himself. He has come for us. Any displays of extraordinary power are displays for **our** benefit; not displays to prove he is the Son of God.

Later in Jesus' ministry...he will do something spectacular with bread. Rather than make a stone into bread, he will take a few loaves and fishes and feed thousands.

He doesn't need to worship the devil in order to receive recognition he **will** receive the recognition of all Jerusalem when he enters it on the back of a donkey while crowds shout 'Hosanna'. In time he is recognized as sent from God and worshipped far and wide.

He does not need to throw himself off a pinnacle to be borne up by angels. He will be saved by his father in a miraculous way...he will be brought back from the tomb to fulfill God's desire to save his beloved children.

Oh yes, the Dark One tried to entice Jesus...and Jesus didn't argue. He knew who he was. He really **was** God's son as Satan suggested. And as God's substance, he just pointed Satan back to the Word of God which says:

We don't live by bread alone.

Worship God and serve him only.

Don't put God to the test.

We know more about Jesus after the temptation in the wilderness. We know clearly that Jesus is God's beloved, able to withstand powerful pressure. Jesus never forgot that he was sent by the father to save us. Jesus passed his test.

In passing the test, Jesus' oneness with God was revealed. This connection was tested by forty days in the desert. Remember though, Jesus was enabled by the Spirit

Lent calls us as Jesus' followers to our own forty desert days and our own test.

And will we I wonder, will we pass the test?

Lent is a time to remember that.

We are God's delight, created out of God's love, for his purposes.

We have so many voices distracting us from the truth that once baptized, we belong to 'Christ'. We are the apple of God's eye. We get mixed up. We seek personal gain over wholeness. We measure our worth by how much money we have, or how many people like us, instead of by how much we follow 'the still small voice'. We value comfort, avoiding any sacrifice or suffering.

Week by week we preachers announce the good news - that God's grace abounds, that nothing we do or fail to do can keep God from breaking faith with us. It is not what we do that matters most; it's what God has done for us in Christ. We are forgiven! Also, through Christ, we have received the Spirit, free gift bestowed on us in Baptism as it was to our Lord Jesus.

The Spirit aided our Lord in overcoming the devil, and the same Spirit lives in us, ready to help us. The Spirit speaks to our hearts, while other voices whisper in our ears. We have to learn to discern the voice of Spirit and follow God's word so it may bear fruit in us. Even Jesus had to listen to perceive the calling that was his, and we must do the same.

God gives us opportunities everyday to listen for the Spirit. Reading Scripture, prayer and worship are time honoured Lenten practices. There are other resources for reflection if we are open. Why not read or watch J.R.R. Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings"? Did you know Tolkien was a devout Christian? Lord of the Rings is an epic battle between good and evil. Young hobbit Frodo's destiny is to be bearer of the wicked ring. He travels against all odds to the fiery volcano of Mordor where he destroys the ring and brings peace to the land. Many times he is tested and tempted to run away from his calling, to listen to those who have a better idea than the only true way he knows he must follow. And as we watch him, we gain courage to follow our path.

There are other films for Lenten reflection: 'Babette's Feast' where Babette, prompted by the Spirit, spends all she has on a sumptuous feast symbolic of God's grace and extravagant love. Have you ever watched 'Chocolat'? This is a modern day parable. It is about the tensions caused when a strange woman opens a chocolate shop during Lent in a small French town. Another suggestion is 'The King's Speech'. This film chronicles the choice made by Bertie (who becomes King George VI) to follow an unconventional regimen to confront his stuttering. You can probably find many other films.

Someone who listened to the Spirit was the remarkable Mattie Stepanek who died in 2004 at the age of 13. In his few years, this courageous boy authored five books of poetry that touched millions of adults and children. His passion was for Peace. All five books made the New York Times bestseller list. Mattie could have been a bitter and lonely young boy. His disease had taken the lives of his three siblings. He knew he was going to die. But he decided to live until he did. He believed God had a special purpose for his life. Despite his diagnosis of mitochondrial myopathy, despite having a tracheotomy in his throat all the time, a ventilator and oxygen always handy, his goals were to become a daddy, a writer, a public speaker, and most of all, a peacemaker. He succeeded in most of them. In his poem "Heartsongs" he says

I have a song
 deep in my heart
 and only I can hear it.
 If I close my eyes and sit very still,
 it is so easy to listen to my song.
 When my eyes are open
 and I am so busy and moving and busy,
 If I take time and listen very hard,
 I can hear my heartsong.
 It makes me feel very happy.

You have a heart song unique to you. Have you heard it? Listen very hard this Lent. Amen.

We want peaceful lives. But Jesus' life was not peaceful. He had constant conflict, beginning with the 40-days in the desert. So we're challenged in this our own 40-day journey, not to run from the challenges and the conflicts. Mainly we are challenged to wake up and to remember the truth **that we are God's beloved children and that he takes great delight in fashioning us for his loving purposes.**

In the film 'The Passion of Christ' which came out a few years ago, there is a figure always present. It is a person wearing a shawl over it's head...pale faced, no eyebrows. Everywhere Jesus goes, this figure is there too, off in the background, but always there, always watching intently. This is the figure of Satan. It's not the red-devil variety of Satan with horns and hooves. Rather, this figure looks human. It blends in. But it is a presence working against Jesus. It is a presence which must be encountered and dealt with, both by Jesus and by us. On Ash Wednesday we hear the sobering words

“Remember, you are dust and to dust you shall return.”

Our time on earth is limited. As we get older, we realize more and more that our time is rushing by. Soon we shall return to dust. But still we all fall asleep to the truth of who we are and why we are here. We misplace our love and become attached to things other than God.

The Good News is that God sends us wake up calls one after another. Once we accept that we are God’s, then we can listen for love, look for love and allow love to awaken within.

Augustine of Hippo walked from village to village teaching and preaching the good news that restless hearts will find rest and peace in God. Centuries later, Francis of Assisi danced, sang, and loved his way through Europe, making Christ’s abundant love visible through the starkness of his self-imposed poverty. Spanish Christians followed Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross into ever-deepening prayer that revealed that humans are meant for love.

Maybe this season of Lent, the test for us is to awaken to God’s love. Maybe more than Satan, we are challenged to notice who in our lives are the agents of love. Who or what reminds us that we belong to God, that our true substance is love and that our highest calling is compassion for others?

We are challenged to pray this Lent and to participate in worship. We are challenged to wake up to the fact that God is at the center of our beings. We are challenged to pray for God’s love to bear fruit within each of us. Pray for the courage to step up and speak the truth in love. Pray not with wordy chattering instructions to God, but sit quietly, listening, watching and waiting for love to awaken. Pray for 20 minutes each day. Pray with your soul’s ears, instead of your mind’s chatter. Learn to listen for God’s still, small voice within.

May this Lent be one in which each of us responds to the wake up call, God’s call to wake up to his love. Amen

