



## \* **“WHEN YOU’RE TEMPTED”**

**Biblical Text: Luke 4:1-13**

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Like today, life is glorious - a gift of God. But it isn't always easy. The hardest moments often feel silent and lonely. In those moments, we often don't know where to turn or find hope. We even wonder, *“Where is God?”* Isaiah 61:3 reminds us that God is **always** at work. He brings \*beauty from ashes and hope from despair. And in our silent moments, we can listen for his still, small, often hidden voice.

During the \*40 days of Lent which began on Wednesday, we're going to look deeper at some of those hard moments in life. Our source material comes from Luke's Gospel, and some of the hardest moments Jesus faced.

\*In fact, Jesus' story - not his baby album story from Christmas - but his grown-up, in his first job story, was, from the beginning, filled with a **lot** of hard moments.

The Gospel writers agree about this. Luke 3:23 tells us. \**“Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his work.”*<sup>1</sup> And Luke 4:1, Matthew 4:1, and Mark 1:12 all tell start the same way, right after Jesus Baptism. They say, as our text does:

\* *“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.”*<sup>2</sup>

We know this story. It's a primer in what to do when we are tempted. \*Barbara Brown Taylor calls it Jesus' *“Wilderness Exam.”*<sup>3</sup> And there are lessons there for us. First, it turns out that the devil is biblically literate. He knows exactly where to find Bible verses to put Jesus to the test. So, just knowing the Bible and being a Christian does not supply us with a \**“Get out of Temptation Free”* Card. It's not that easy.

\*The more important lesson here is that Jesus knows that it is important to not only know the Bible but to actually do what the Bible says - which is how he passes his wilderness exam. Every time the devil offered him more stuff – more money – more bread – more fame - more power – Jesus turned him down! Why?

Jesus was *“full up,”* so he said, on worshipping God and serving only him. So, by the end of the story, the devil still has all his bribes in his bag, and Jesus is free to go - this time. Luke 4:13 says the devil \* *“departed from him until an opportune time.”*<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Luke 3:23, Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Copyright © National Council of Churches. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Luke 4:1 (and parallel texts in Matthew 4:1 and Mark 1:12.)

<sup>3</sup> Inspiration for this message came from the sermon *“The Wilderness Exam”* by Barbara Brown Taylor, February 21, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Op. Cit. Luke 4:13, *New Revised Standard Version*.

And, of course, there is always an opportune time for temptation. It comes in things as relatively minor as the first thin mint in a new roll of Girl Scout Cookies, and who hasn't been tempted by that? **I have.** Or in the little, "leaky faucet" drip, drip, drips of eroding integrity in which we sell our souls one little choice at a time.

Vice is not merely the opposite of virtue. Sometimes our worst temptations come in pursuit of things that sound worthwhile like security, prosperity, and national pride. \* *"We are rarely in more dangerous territory,"* says Bishop Will Willimon, *"than when we dress up our own self-interest in noble ideals like freedom, faith and democracy."*<sup>5</sup>

\*If you've been to Church before you've already heard a sermon, or three or four on what Jesus and the devil said to each other in our text. It's good stuff - in fact you can read it for yourself in Luke. \* It's also Monday's daily Scripture in our Lenten Daily Devotions which you can find in the office or our webpage, [oldmission.org](http://oldmission.org).

But here's the thing - when temptation comes our way, none of us is going to get the "Son of God Test." You and I are going to get the regular old Adam and Eve test. And for us, the devil doesn't need more than an all-you-can-eat buffet, the promise of a few tax breaks, or a bout of the flu to cause us to lose sight of our faith, and feel like there's probably a better deal than trusting in God, who doesn't seem to be around.

The issue isn't what tempts us so much as where our testing takes place - in the wilderness – in those silent agonizing moments – when life just isn't working. You don't have to go to the deserts of Judea. Every one of us has already been there.

I love Barbara Brown Taylors' description: *"Maybe it just looked like a hospital waiting room ... or a cheap motel bed after you got kicked out of the house ... or the parking lot where you couldn't find your car on the day you lost your job. \*It may even have been a kind of desert in ... your own chest, where you begged for a word from God and heard nothing but the wheezing bellows of your own breath."*<sup>6</sup>

"Wilderness Exams" come in so many shapes and sizes that the only way you can really tell you are in one is to look around for what you normally count on and notice that you are coming up empty. I'm convinced that it's in our wilderness exams, in the silent wrestling, that we discover who we really are and what faith is really about.

**I guess that could sound like bad news, but I don't think it is.**

I am convinced that the wilderness is one of the most faith-forming, spirit-filled, life-changing places a person can be. That's why we fight so hard against entering there. We'd rather do anything, almost, than deal with the dry and dusty places of our faith.

<sup>5</sup> William Willimon in, [Sinning Like a Christian: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins](#). Copyright © 2005 Abingdon Press, p. 29.

<sup>6</sup> Op. Cit. "The Wilderness Exam" by Dr. Barbara Brown Taylor

Almost everyone uses something to avoid dealing with what's really going on in our lives. Surfing the net, Facebook, or Pinterest, marathon reruns of Boston Legal, Pottery Barn catalogs, a little too much wine or single malt Scotch. I'm not saying those are awful things. I'm just saying they are distractions that we reach for when we're too tired, sad, or afraid to deal with the wilderness of the present moment.

It would be great if we could just give up our cell phones for Lent and automatically begin hearing the still, small voice of God in our wilderness times. If it worked like that, church would be full this morning and Sprint and Verizon would be out of business. If it worked like that, Lent would only be about twenty minutes long.

Instead what Lent offers is forty whole days of trying to listen for God's voice, trying to find out what life is like without the usual painkillers and distractions. The problem is – once you take the headphones off, silence can be really loud. Once you turn off the television, a night can get really long. Not to mention our own spiritual insufficiency to deal with life on our own, like we try to do.

It would be a mistake for me to try to describe your testing or temptations. Only you can do that, because only you know what kind of devils have your number, and what kinds of bribes they use to get you to pick up. All I know for sure is that a voluntary trip to the wilderness this Lent is a great way to find your faith or find it again.

And here's what I believe. Something powerful happened to Jesus in his solitary journey, in his wilderness testing, and it can happen for us. Luke 4:14 says, this *"Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee."*<sup>7</sup>

Within a few verses, he is in Church, with a whole library of Scripture from which to choose his words. It's not an accident that Jesus found the words of Isaiah 61:

*"The Lord has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, to release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, to comfort those who mourn ... to give them a crown of beauty instead of ashes and the oil of gladness instead of mourning."*<sup>8</sup>

**That's his promise for the wilderness journey, whoever you are.**

*Is it lonely in the wilderness? Absolutely. With God, are you really alone?*

*Is there a hunger inside of you? Probably. Could it be a sign of life?*

*Can you listen more closely for God's leading than you are? Maybe.*

*Wouldn't now be a good time to start? Maybe it would.*

*Can you take it one day at a time? I'll try. That's all he asks. Amen.*

<sup>7</sup> Op. Cit. Luke 4:14, *New Revised Standard Version*.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Isaiah 61:1-3, *New Revised Standard Version*.