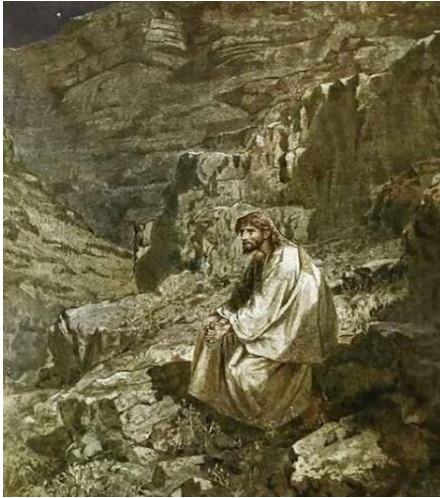


**FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT
MARCH 6, 2022**



Jesus in the wilderness

St. John United Church of Christ
10207 Lincoln Trail, Fairview Heights, IL 397-6323
Rev. Rosemary Captain

IT IS COMMUNION SUNDAY SO HAVE YOUR
ELEMENTS HANDY

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

We may be entering this season arid, dry from pain and injustices.

And yet, God is still hydrating our spirits.

We may be wandering, feeling as if we have no direction.

And yet, God is guiding us in the wilderness.

We may be fearful, wondering what comes next.

And yet, God is surrounding us with peace.

We may begin our Lenten journey spiritually arid, aimless, and anxious.

But the Spirit of Strength will never leave our side.

***INVOCATION:**

Divine Sojourner, as we saunter far into the wilderness, may your light sustain us. May the questions that fill our minds with doubt drift away into the sands of the journey. May we dig within our souls to remove the prejudices deep within us. However, we wander in this season, may your Holy Glow refocus our attention on our relationship with you and the ways we connect with our siblings. Amen.

PRAYER OF REFLECTION AND GROWTH:

God of the Road, we journey together into the wilderness again. In this time filled with new spiritual practices and studies, our minds will be “tested.” Doubts will creep in as we seek your presence. At times, we will slide away from our responsibilities to care for our neighbors.

“Keep awake,” you call to us.

And so we ask ourselves:

Will hurtful words from others taunt us, and inhibit our growth with you?

Will negative images in our minds draw us away from our practices?

Will we snooze to the needs of this world and ignore the pain in our communities?

Deliver us from the temptations of this world and the tests that we impose upon ourselves. Amen.

Silence

***ASSURANCE OF GOD’S GRACE:**

When we aimlessly wander throughout this Lenten journey, God follows us – even into the depths of the wilderness. May we see God’s presence, knowing we are never alone on arid days and in barren lands. Amen!

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

Living in the Most High’s shelter,
camping in the Almighty’s^[a] shade,

² I say to the LORD, “You are my refuge, my stronghold!

You are my God—the one I trust!”

⁹ Because you’ve made the LORD my refuge,
the Most High, your place of residence—

¹⁰ no evil will happen to you;

no disease will come close to your tent.

¹¹ Because he will order his messengers to help you,
to protect you wherever you go.

¹² They will carry you with their own hands
so you don’t bruise your foot on a stone.

¹³ You’ll march on top of lions and vipers;
you’ll trample young lions and serpents underfoot.

¹⁴ God says, “Because you are devoted to me,
I’ll rescue you.

I’ll protect you because you know my name.

¹⁵ Whenever you cry out to me, I’ll answer.
I’ll be with you in troubling times.

I’ll save you and glorify you.

¹⁶ I’ll fill you full with old age.
I’ll show you my salvation.”

***GOSPEL: Luke 4:1-13**

Jesus returned from the Jordan River full of the Holy Spirit, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. ² There he was tempted for forty days by the devil. He ate nothing during those days and afterward Jesus was starving. ³ The devil said to him, “Since you are God’s Son, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.”

⁴ Jesus replied, “It’s written, *People won’t live only by bread.*”

⁵ Next the devil led him to a high place and showed him in a single instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ The devil said, “I will give you this whole domain and the glory of all these kingdoms. It’s been entrusted to me and I can give it to anyone I want. ⁷ Therefore, if you will worship me, it will all be yours.”

⁸ Jesus answered, “It’s written, *You will worship the Lord your God and serve only him.*”

⁹ The devil brought him into Jerusalem and stood him at the highest point of the temple. He said to him, “Since you are God’s Son, throw yourself down from here; ¹⁰ for it’s written: *He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you* ¹¹ and *they will take you up in their hands so that you won’t hit your foot on a stone.*”

¹² Jesus answered, “It’s been said, *Don’t test the Lord your God.*” ¹³ After finishing every temptation, the devil departed from him until the next opportunity.

These are the ancient Words shared with us anew.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: “Don’t Get Lost in the Temptations”

Our lectionary this Sunday goes backwards, it seems to me. Last Sunday we read from Luke 9 the Transfiguration story. This week we read from Luke 4

with the story of Jesus going back to the time following his baptism when the Spirit let him into the wilderness.

The one thing these stories have in common is the fact that they are both significant events in the life of Jesus. When Jesus steps out of the water after being baptized, God said to him, “You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.” With that message Jesus knows he is on the correct path for his life; to be a missionary to God’s people. As we will see, his time in the wilderness was a time to reflect on the methods he must chose to win men and women to God. And in the Transfiguration story God speaks to him again to assure Jesus that his path to Jerusalem to face his enemies was the correct path to his glory.

Today we will concentrate on the story of Jesus in the wilderness. First of all, there are two general points to be noted. First is the fact that Jesus is the only one who knew about his challenges with the devil. At some time, he must have himself told his disciples about this most intimate experience of his soul.

Secondly, the whole point of the temptations is that they could have come only to a man who had exceptional powers and who could do astonishing things. It is no temptation to us to turn stones into bread or leap from a Temple pinnacle, for the simple

reason that it is impossible for us to do such things. In other words, when we are tempted by the devil, we are challenged by things we can actually do. We CAN move away from God and commit sins. So, keep that in mind.

As Jesus is reflecting on the method he should use to get his message across to the people, the devil gives his “suggestions” on how to achieve his mission. The first temptation the devil presents to Jesus is, “If you want people to follow you, use your wonderful powers to give the people material things.” In other words, Jesus should bribe people to follow him.

In the second temptation the tempter said, “worship me and all will be yours.” This is the temptation to compromise. The devil said, “I have got the people in my grip. Don’t set your standards so high. Strike a bargain with me. Just compromise a little with evil and people will follow you.”

The third temptation was to do something sensational for the people. Jesus saw quite clearly that a sensational action would cause amazement for a short time but never last.

After each temptation, Jesus answered the devil with quotes from the Torah. Jesus uses ancient words from God to point out to the devil how these schemes would not convince the people to learn who

Jesus was and what it would take to be a part of God’s kingdom.

What are our temptations in life? How can our knowledge and faith in Jesus lead our paths to God’s kingdom? Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER: Beginning with silent personal prayer God above history, God in our history, God at the end of history, as the ancestors of Israel were wandering Aramaeans, so our ancestors were emigrating pilgrims, seeking freedom to worship and to govern themselves. That is exactly what the people in the Ukraine are doing now. Neighboring countries are accepting these pilgrims who are fleeing from the violence. We are grateful for the part you play, dear God, in rescuing these people. Teach us how to be welcoming to all pilgrims searching for God and the peace that comes from knowing Jesus’ love.

We pray for wisdom when we are tempted. Following temptations is the easy way of life. Show us how take the harder paths to follow Jesus and learn of his suffering as we may be challenged.

We pray for all those on our prayer list and all those we hold dear in our hearts, that they may feel your loving presence and know peace.

We pray all these things in the name of Jesus who reigns in our lives, . . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

REFLECTION ON GIVING:

Deuteronomy 26:2 (NRSV) declares this:

"...you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name."

How do we spend our "first fruits"- the best in which we have? Have we kept it for ourselves? Have we dedicated these gifts to God and shared them with our neighbors who lack basic necessities? How is God calling us to share the best we possess?

***DEDICATION OF GIFTS:**

Holy Stream of Gifts,

We share our gratitude for all of our fruits – from our possessions to knowledge and from our time to abilities. May our "best" be something that we do

not hoard but that we freely give away. As we embrace this season of fasting and reflection, may we recognize the best of our talents, treasures, and time and share with God and neighbor. Amen.

CELEBRATION OF HOLY COMMUNION INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Scripture says, "You shall not live by bread ... alone."

So, what do you spread on your bread?

This bread is spread with the butter of compassion, and the jam of welcome.

Jesus said, "You shall not live by bread alone."

So how do you serve your bread?

We serve this bread on the plates of plenty offered to the food-insecure every day of the week.

Every Lent we hear, "You shall not live by bread, alone." So, who sits at your table?

All: All God's children, ones I know, ones I don't know yet. Even when I feel alone, I am never alone.

Together in spirit we eat this bread and drink this cup

All: Bread alone is like eating a stone.

Words of Remembering

We remember the stories of wanderers bringing first fruit in a basket to give thanks for finding a home, and we give thanks for our kitchen

tables and our precious sanctuary, both homes and places we share.

And we remember that Jesus Christ sitting among those whose feet he had washed at the Passover table of precious and ancient tradition, anticipated betrayal and desertion, pain and even death, but made a new thanksgiving, a new hope, a new way for peace, a new Covenant, of blessed bread and poured wine on a global table, inviting us always to share from our brokenness and grace.

Prayer of Consecration (*Psalm 19*)

O God, the sky speaks your glory and deep space your creation. Daybreak announces hope and starlight sings rest in a language that needs no translation but closing our eyes in prayer.

Nothing is hidden from you, and you make no barriers for human understanding. We are revived, enlivened, warned, and comforted.

Beyond even the bright and sweet parables of our lives, you free us from definitions of relationship based in dominion and being dominated and you lead us to words of reconciliation and grace. So reconciled, we pray –

Let the Bread of our mouths and the Cup upon which our hearts meditate, be acceptable to you, O God, at this ordinary table and in our lives of redeeming. Amen

Sharing of the Elements

Let us receive the gift of God, the Bread.

We are never alone; we live in this Bread.

Let us receive the gift of God, the Cup of Covenant

We find Christ in the Cup because we share it.

***PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:**

God of feast and fast, who relishes falafel, jambalaya, pad Thai, and even post-Mardi Gras pancakes, help us eat always with compassion for the earth, delight in the flavors of every people, and generosity in sharing, in spite of temptations to hoard or control. Praise to you – locavore, foodie, walker in all our wilderness, Eucharist! Amen.

***BENEDICTION:**

As we wander on this journey,

May God the Divine Light open our souls to healing and wisdom.

May Christ the Sojourner lead us into oases of renewal in arid and barren times.

May the Spirit of Hope fill us with courage to carry on. As Jesus embraced the struggles of the wilderness, may we find strength to abide in our wilderness of the soul. Amen.

PRAYER LIST: Urban Baum, Donna Isselhard, Agnes Doctolero, David Seneczyn, Warren Neff, Lynn Hursey, Carol White, Dennis Franklin, John Biehl, Cheri Schutzenhofer, Rich Schmitt, Dorothy Wagner.

LENTEN STUDY begins on March 16 via Zoom 6:30 pm. If you don't have a computer, you can join us on your phone. The Zoom meeting ID is 878-8123-0951 and the pass code is 651278. The phone number is 1-312-626-6799 and use the same ID and passcode.

PLEASE NOTE THAT DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME STARTS NEXT WEEKEND. Set your clocks ahead