

## **“Wanderers Called by Christ”**

Luke 4:1-2, 5-13

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Before we had our baby, Jacob, my wife and I liked to camp. There were a couple of reasons why we loved camping: 1. It cost much less than staying at a hotel. 2. We could fully enjoy the gifts of nature; starry night in the sky, fresh air, and hiking the trails. 3. We could get away from our busy lives, forgetting worries and stresses. Three years ago, we drove to Point Reyes National Seashore without a reservation. We assumed that we could find any place to sleep overnight. We didn't realize that it was a Labor Day weekend, so all campgrounds and hotels were reserved except for a couple of expensive rooms in a luxurious hotel. We had to sleep overnight in a compact car on a stormy night near the lighthouse in Point Reyes. We couldn't sleep well, but we talked a lot overnight. We learned two lessons: Never make any assumptions and reservations are important. In the beginning of our marriage, camping was a humble trip, but it gave us precious time to know more about each other, understand each other, and we were able to build up our love together.

Jesus Christ didn't do tent camping like us, but he made a special trip to the wilderness before he dedicated himself to fulfill God's purpose of salvation. Today's Scripture reading shows us what happened: “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.” After Jesus was baptized at the river of Jordan he decided to go to the wilderness and stayed there for forty days. Jesus knew that he might give away his life while he was doing his public ministry. So this trip for forty days was not a vacation trip, but it was a life transforming discipline to make himself ready before God.

As I shared last Sunday, the number ‘forty’ has symbolic meaning along with the Old Testament story when the people of God were tested in the wilderness for forty years. We recall also that it rained for forty days and nights in the story of Noah and this was a time of testing for Noah's faith. We recall also that Moses was on Mount Sinai for forty days and nights. We also recall that Elijah was on Mount Horeb (Mount Sinai) for forty days and nights.

Let me ask you a question: Why do you think the Holy Spirit let Jesus go into the wilderness? What special lesson does the wilderness teach us? We can think about two lessons from Jesus' trip to the wilderness. First of all, the wilderness was a place for solitude, not a lonely space to Jesus. Paul Tillich says

that the word “loneliness” talks about the pain of being alone, but the word “solitude” expresses the glory of being alone. The time of solitude in the wilderness gave Jesus time to revisit himself and assured his life purpose as the Messiah. Jesus Christ focused on God and tried to discern God’s will for him during forty days in the wilderness. This discipline of solitude will be the first lesson for our trip to the wilderness during Lent.

Don’t misunderstand me. I am not encouraging you to take a trip to the Nevada desert or wilderness camping in the state parks. We don’t have to go to desert or wilderness for a time of solitude. Our daily life can be a place for the spiritual discipline of solitude. In your daily lives, how many minutes can you take for your solitude, focusing on God and trying to discern God’s will for you? As Nancy Roth shares in our Lenten studies book, “Creating of ‘holy spaciousness’,” and time spent with God is “not merely a part of the day but the *center* of the day. The discipline of solitude may not produce instant spiritual depth; yet in the practice of solitude we gradually become aware of a shifting within us. We need a time of solitude to be awake spiritually and to see the right thing for our life. A daily time of solitude strengthens us against the temptations of greed and power and reminds us that it is God we worship and serve.”

Do you remember how Jesus responded when the devil challenged him? As we read together, the devil tested Jesus with three temptations in our story: The first, stone into bread, secondly, a miraculous rescue if Jesus would throw himself from the pinnacle of the temple. The last one was that Jesus was enticed to pursue glory and authority through political power. Jesus’ answer was inspirational to us. He said, “Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.” Jesus’ answer was a simple one which was to be with God. God wants us to not pursue the Devil’s way, but Jesus’ choice. The devil’s temptations were very sweet and greatly attractive even to our ears: Money, super power, personal glory, recognition and authority of political power. The devil’s temptations remind us how deeply our heart and minds are spoiled by the desires of possessions. Now in our culture, consumerism becomes another idol that we worship. People love to buy, accumulate things and pile them up in their storage closet and garage. Henri J. M Nouwen says, “Without solitude we remain victims of our society and continue to be entangled in the illusions of the false self.” Accumulation enslaves us and possesses us – accumulation of things, honors, or compliments. The reality is that the more things we accumulate, the more anxiety we feel about protecting them.

Jesus’ discipline in the wilderness taught us another lesson in simplicity. This discipline of simplicity will be the second lesson of trip to the wilderness. We should live out our lives not by the eyes of this worldly culture, but by the

eyes of God, who loves us and sent His only son to save us. Tent camping is a great metaphor of the discipline of simplicity. We need a tent and a bedroll, a change of clothes, a bar of soap and a toothbrush, water and simple food, a pan for cooking and eating utensils (and a compass!). That's all. When we backpack, we don't take more than we need.

Lent is a great season for us to have self-evaluation and spiritual renewal through the discipline of solitude and simplicity. This is not a time to make us guilty or shame ourselves, but a special time to reflect on our lives and experience God's acceptance. As Morton Kelsey says, "Our part is mostly to accept the hand already stretched out to us. All we need to do that is simply allow ourselves to believe the all-powerful, holy God is that all-loving, personal, holy One whose hand is stretched out to us." God wants us to make a fresh start in him. Jesus Christ invites us to take a time of solitude in your place of wilderness and reconnect your heart and soul. I pray that God will transform our hearts, healing our souls through the discipline of this simplicity and restoration of our relationship with God.