

## “Space for Trust”

Psalm 25:4-10; Matthew 4:1-7

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Lent is a season of forty days, not counting Sundays. It began last Wednesday and will end on Holy Saturday, the evening before Easter. Sundays in Lent are not counted in the forty days because each Sunday represents a "mini-Easter". The number forty is a biblical metaphor which represents the time Jesus spent in the wilderness, enduring the temptation of Satan. He took this time preparing to begin his public ministry. Some of you may be curious what happened to him after those 40 days of praying there. *What was Jesus' ultimate goal to gain in the wilderness?* A simple answer is his trust in God. He wanted to make sure that he has unbreakable relationship with the Father God in him and that is the absolute trust in God. This was needed for him, because he needed courage. Jesus would have imagined that people even his beloved disciples would betray him and put him in danger and suffering, or even death on the cross. He wanted to be clear about his life purpose, God's promise, assurance that God will be always with him no matter what would happen to him, even death, and his deep desire to get closer to God so that his choice would be not on his own but God's will. Therefore, he won't be afraid of any fear or evil when he dared to move forward.

What spiritual messages do we find in Jesus' solitude? I found four words for our spiritual growth: *Pause, Purpose, Promise and Peace*. First, *Pause*. Jesus needed a break from family, friends and his regular routine in order to see God [and himself] more clearly. Maybe he sought more time with God as he searched for direction and answers. And this pause in the wilderness was not because of his lonesomeness, but because of need of being in solitude. A Christian spiritual master, Henri Nouwen explains them as follows:

Loneliness is painful; solitude is peaceful. Loneliness makes us cling to others in desperation; solitude allows us to respect others in their uniqueness and create community. Letting our aloneness grow into solitude and... it requires conscious choices about whom to be with, what to study, how to pray, and when to ask for counsel. But wise choices will help us to find the solitude where our hearts can grow in love.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://henrinouwen.org/meditation/finding-solitude/> Accessed March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017

For Jesus, ‘wilderness’ wasn’t a space for traveling to enjoy nature scenery or distract him from his lonesome feelings, but a holy and separate time to be with God. Wilderness is a perfect space for his personal time with God. In life, we need *this* spiritual pause. Taking a pause means to improve your spiritual sensitivity, awareness and your effort to be *intentionally* with God. If you make space and room in your hearts, God can come and dwell in you. Spiritual pause enables you to create space in you so that God can come closer to you. Then as if God is your close friend, He will speak to you and you will hear His voice in wisdom and inspiration. Ancient Celtic Christian tradition teaches us that good pause is your good discerning practice: “Pause before judging. Pause before assuming. Pause before accusing. Pause whenever you’re reacting harshly and you’ll avoid doing and saying things you’ll later regret.”

Second, **Purpose**. Jesus was eager to revisit his relationship with God, find his ultimate life purpose and commit himself to pursue God’s desire and mission through his whole life devotion. Jesus wanted to check in with himself and God while he was preparing for his next chapter in his life and ministry. And then Jesus’ spiritual discipline in the wilderness was his temptation by the devil. Isn’t it interesting? Why suddenly does the Devil show up here? We need to remember that the word Devil comes from a Greek word, “*diabolos*” which means, “*the one who separates,*” *separating you from purpose, distracting you from what is most important.*” The whole focus of the Devil’s temptation was to tell Jesus that there will be no life purpose and meaning but just enjoying your physical, psychological amusement and the pursuit of pleasure and power will be the best purpose and goal for your life. What are the challenges?

The Devil challenged Jesus to command stones to become loaves of bread, asked for God’s almighty power to rescue him if Jesus throws himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. Lastly, the Devil showed off his power to worship him. Temptation is always around us taking its many different masks. Temptation can be any type of thing to distrust God, doubt on God and separate us from God. The Devil also whispers to challenge us to turn away from our God if God doesn’t make sense to us. Finding a life purpose is to find joy and love in our intimate relationship with God. The Devil’s ultimate purpose is to take away your faith, faithfulness and trust from God!

Third, **Promise**. What Jesus learned from devil’s test and temptation was deeper spiritual understanding of God’s promise. God’s promise is not the guarantee of giving us prosperity and material blessings. Instead God’s presence himself in us is God’s promise. Ironically prosperity and materialism were the devil’s temptation. If we trust in God, we already have God’s promise and purpose in us. God loves each of us individually and deeply and wants our lives

to be powerful forces in bringing hope, joy, and love, lifting others in the name of God. Believe in God and God's promise to be with you!

Last, **Peace**. Imagine Jesus' anxiety and fear about his upcoming future challenges and hardships. He knew that when he returned back to people and began his public ministry proclaiming God's unconditional love and forgiving grace and declaring good news of salvation and eternal life for everyone. But people wouldn't understand him. Rather he had to go through life dangers. In the wilderness, He wanted to rediscover the absolute trust and peace in his heart. He needed courage. When Jesus gave his full trust to God after Devil's temptation, he found peace in his heart. Peace brings him confidence and assurance that God's divine presence is with him with no fear no matter what would happen to him later.

In life, there are times that we may feel that God wouldn't respond to our desperate situations. There are times that God seems to be absent and silent to our urgent needs. In the Bible, God doesn't say that we should **understand** all things, but encourages us to **trust** God. Trust is the most important element in our spiritual relationship with God. Our first Old Testament reading highlights a word, "Trust". It says "To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long." Trusting God is the basic foundation in our spiritual life. In Psalm 23, do you remember a sentence, "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff-they comfort me." A theologian and writer Fredrick Buechner reminds us that the Psalmist doesn't try to explain evil. He doesn't try to minimize evil. He simply says he does not fear evil.

God never leaves us alone. So do not be afraid. Have assurance of faith that God is with you always. I encourage you to keep these four spiritual elements: **Pause, Purpose, Promise and Peace** for your spiritual practice: Enjoy taking a pause to hear God's voice that nudges your soul. Try to be tuned in with God and think of your life purpose deeply in every step that you take and every choice that you make. Remember that you're God's ultimate promise and God promises to be with you. Receive God's peace so that you will have courage to go through your challenges and move forward. During Lent, I hope that you will find trust in God and realign our lives seeking to live and love as more faithful and loving children of God and Christ's followers. Amen.