

May I speak to you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The first Sunday of Lent and what a gospel reading: Jesus and temptation.

As we look at this passage, I want to orient us around the two concepts I mentioned on Ash Wednesday that may help us in our Lenten journey: point of reference and worldview. In simplicity: what do we look to to orient ourselves in our daily living? and what is real?

In this passage we see Jesus as always, as both Savior and model for living. What Jesus encounters and how Jesus responds has something to teach us about how to live. This passage is loaded with things that may confirm, confront, or call us to tweak our worldview. What is real? What have we or may we discover to embrace as fundamental pieces of reality?

Today we hear of the Holy Spirit, the wilderness, the Devil, and temptation. We must ask ourselves where each of these fits in our worldview or do they? How do we orient to the Holy Spirit, the wilderness, the Devil, and temptation?

These are all words that are fairly common in our Christian language but let us look a little more closely.

Jesus is led by the Spirit to fast for 40 days in the wilderness. This is no fun. But Jesus goes and gets really hungry. Jesus is full of the Spirit and the Spirit leads. In our Christian worldview, we learn that the Holy Spirit dwells within us and we can be full of the Holy Spirit: know the Holy Spirit's leading. Our Christian spirituality is fundamentally about union with God. What a wonderful aspect of our Christian life to be aware of and practice. Filled and led. We can expect that, and we can ask for that in our daily living.

As we see with Jesus, this filling and leading does not necessarily mean we go to happy place. The Greek word for wilderness here is a solitary place, a place that is lonely, desolate, uninhabited (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance). Levine and Witherington (The Gospel of Luke) claim the wilderness is a place of testing: exposing our hearts – and was in the 40-year Exodus wilderness experience, they further assert, like the Exodus experience, that the wilderness is also a place of new beginnings.

Temptation happens in the time of testing and new beginnings. Crystalizing convictions and acting upon them. It kind of makes sense that this takes place for Jesus as he begins his public ministry.

We all live in a time of temptation, sin, and a place where there is a devil. Peter writes about the devil, I Peter chapter 5: "Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour." That is sobering.

So, the question becomes, does our worldview include the existence of a devil? I know that sounds a little weird, but it is an important piece of our Christian worldview. Now, I am not saying we have to go look for the devil under every rock...it actually sounds like the devil looks for us. The devil is a foundational aspect of our Christian worldview – remember – Eve and the apple?

In this passage there remains a bit of an open question regarding the devil: does the devil have the authority he claims in his temptation of power? Jesus does not correct the devil. The presupposition could be that with the fall, the sin of Adam and Eve, authority in this world has legitimately been given over to the devil.

We need the devil in our worldview. Without the devil there is no sin, no need for a Savior, no need to battle temptation. The existence of the devil elevates a respect for our current context – life in this world: we are weak, we do need help, we must participate in fighting temptation and sin.

Sin is a word we may easily hang definition on. Two aspects of its etymology are helpful. The first comes from archery. Any arrow missing the bullseye in an archery tournament was called sin. It does not matter by how much or by how little. Sin. Missing the mark. The second relevant aspect of etymology is that of a path followed. The momentum of life in a direction.

Temptation is more subtle and without alertness, it is tricky, no wonder it leads to sin. J. Heinrich Arnold, in his book *Freedom from Sinful Thoughts*, wrote on temptation through a word picture – a leaf and a stream:

“A leaf that falls into a stream just where the water disappears into the ground...” he writes, “will come out again at the next opening, because the underground stream has faithfully carried it there, though during this journey it has been beyond the reach of any outside interference. In the same way, an idea that has been introduced into our minds will produce its effects after longer or shorter subconscious development. . .The leaf symbolizes our inner life. When we place a positive image or idea into our heart, it will remain in us and work in us until it appears again in the flow of conscious thought. The same is true if we give room to an evil thought or image. It may be concealed for a long time by the subconscious, but then suddenly it is there, and its previously unnoticed effect on our inner life will also make itself felt” (p. 37).

We are complicated creatures living with challenges. No wonder we need not only a Savior but a model to show us how to live.

In this temptation scene, likely Jesus is not being transported to places physically to be tempted. He is alone in the wilderness and likely praying and perhaps in meditation has this encounter. Jesus is tempted to quick fix hunger, government, and to the demonstration of divine power. We do not face the caliber of temptation that Jesus did, but we face it. Chrysostom, one of the early church fathers, provides a helpful threefold categorization of vice that is fitting for these temptations: love of pleasure, love of possessions, love of glory (Orations). Those are things that may tempt us, flowing through the stream of our subconscious.

In response to these temptations Jesus uses resources that we have available to us: The Spirit of God and the Word of God.

Both must be important and powerful since we see here a successful conquering of temptation. We need to not move over that too quickly.

Earlier I mentioned this crazy reality that in our Christian life we are indwelt and may be filled with the Holy Spirit. God lives in each of us. That sounds pretty powerful.

And the Bible...One of the actions listed in our call to a Holy Lent from Ash Wednesday is Meditation on God's Holy Word. To know it. So, it is flowing through our subconscious and fighting for us and able to show itself at the needed moment.

We garner much about our Christian worldview in this passage, things that we see throughout the New Testament – which is important; we never want to make conclusions from a single verse or passage of scripture but hold the whole of it in mind.

We glean there is more going on than we can see, we live in a time of spiritual battle – there really is a devil, we can be filled with the Holy Spirit, and God's Word is powerful.

May God bless us in our beginnings of this Lenten season.

Amen.