

*Sermon for March 10, 2019 – Luke 4:1-13, Lent 1C*

What is it that you want? And what kind of person do you want to be?

These are the questions Jesus faced when the Spirit led him out into the wilderness. What do you really want? And what kind of person do you really want to be?

Luke tells us that the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness, where for forty days Jesus was tempted by the devil. We can think of the devil in a lot of ways, but for today let's think of the devil as a force that is trying to turn Jesus from what Jesus intends to live out. Jesus had only just been baptized and had not yet started his world-changing ministry. Jesus had just heard that voice coming from heaven in his baptism, assuring him, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you, I am well pleased."

It is at that point, just before he begins his ministry, that Jesus must answer those questions:

What is it that you really want?

And what kind of person do you really intend to be? What does it mean to be the Son of God?

Here is the thing about temptation – it often comes disguised as a friend, to help you get through a tough situation. What comes to test Jesus in the wilderness comes in the disguise of a friendly helper.

This is the voice that tries to turn Jesus away from God: "Hey, I'm just here to help you! I'm on your side! Really, we both just want what's best for you."

Luke tells us after Jesus had been fasting for forty days in the wilderness, that by the end of that time, Jesus was "famished." Jesus came among us as a human, in a human body, with the sufferings of a human body. Of course, he's famished. But Jesus also is fully divine. Fully human, and fully divine. And both the devil in Luke's gospel – as well as Jesus – both of them know that Jesus has immense divine power.

In today's reading, we have this phrase that means something a little different in Greek than it sounds like in English. The words the devil repeats to Jesus are: "If you are the Son of God..."

But the meaning in Greek is more like this: "If you are the Son of God... and we both KNOW that you ARE...!"

In other words, the devil is not *doubting* that Jesus is the Son of God. The devil is saying, "Hey, we BOTH know that you're rree-e-ally special! So, Son of God, what are you doing putting up with that miserable human body, that growling animal stomach, when all you have to do is, you know, command this stone to become a nice toasty warm loaf of nourishing whole-grain bread? You ARE the Son of God, after all. You don't have to suffer hunger pangs... Just a suggestion, from your new friend in the wilderness! I'm only here to help!"

And just like that, here we are: *What does Jesus really want? What kind of person does Jesus really want to be?*

He has a mission, he has a purpose, he was filled with the Holy Spirit at his baptism – “So, what's it going to be? Are you going to really play this pointless game of putting up with a human body and all the pain that comes with it? Why not just treat yourself out here, in the middle of nowhere? Who's gonna know? Who's gonna care?”

What's Jesus' response? He quotes God's wisdom in scripture: "One does not live by bread alone." In other words, Jesus responds that some things are more important than personal comfort.

...Huh, well that didn't work. But you know, Jesus had been alone in the wilderness for a good long time. Wouldn't it be nice to get back in society? And hey – here's a thought – wouldn't it be even nicer to RUN society? To be large and in charge? Make things go the way they ought to be?

So Jesus' would-be new friend promises him leadership! "Check 'em out," says the friendly voice. "These are all the kingdoms in the world, and they are mine. I will give you all the goodies they have to offer, plus you can *rule* over them! You can be the boss! With your kind of power, you can make them into anything you want them to be -- and all you have to do is just quietly let me be YOUR boss, but of course, I'll let YOU run the show. Worship me, and it is all yours," says that friendly, generous devil.

What does Jesus really want? What kind of person does Jesus really want to be? What does it mean to be the Son of God?

Does Jesus want to control the way the world runs? Have you ever wished you could control the way things go? Have you ever joked, "Well, you know -- if I were king of the world, if I were queen of the world, things would be different!" That's the opportunity Jesus' new pal is offering.

It turns out once again that the kind of person Jesus really wants to be is God's person. And again, Jesus responds with God's wisdom through scripture: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only God."

And right away, the friendly voice agrees. "Oh, of course, of course! Hey, no argument here! You're GOD's son. Silly me!"

And suddenly Jesus finds himself looking down over the city of Jerusalem, as the devil whisks him to the top of the Temple.

"So," the devil says, "here we are.... Standing on the top of God's house, God's temple in Jerusalem.... Because if you are the Son of God... and my goodness, we BOTH KNOW that you ARE... let's give God's protection a test drive. Just take a leap off the top of God's holy temple. I know scripture, too, and it is written that God's angels will rush to protect you! You're special! You'll drift down as gently as a feather on an angel's wing! Try it out!"

What does Jesus really want? What kind of person does Jesus really want to be?

As it turns out, Jesus truly still wants to be the Son of God, he still wants to be God's person. Jesus held fast to God's way, even if it meant he had a human body that grew tired and hungry. Even if it meant not forcing people to obey his authority. Even if it meant taking the leap of faith, rather than a leap off the temple, to trust in God's love and protection all the way to the cross and to the grave.

And what about you? Where is your wilderness? What are you hungry for, what are you famished for? What do you wish you had control over? What assurance would you like that God protects you?

What is it that you want? What kind of person do you want to be?

I think one temptation for us when we hear this gospel story is to think that it is only about Jesus. Jesus held firm in his identity in God, in his calling and his mission. But that is *Jesus*, we might say to ourselves. Jesus is Jesus, and we are not Jesus. And it's true! We are not Jesus. We are not Jesus, and we are not saviors, though sometimes we might be tempted to think that we are.

But we, like Jesus, *are* called in our baptisms. And God calls us, too, to mission and ministry, to live as God's beloved children. You, too, are God's people. You too are sent out in the wildernesses of this world with the constant help and guidance of the Holy Spirit, to equip you to follow Jesus.

It might have seemed like Jesus was alone in that wilderness, and the devil was the only friend to turn up. It might seem like that for us, sometimes. But at all times and in all wildernesses, God is present. This world belongs to God; kingdoms, wildernesses and all.

No, we are not Jesus – but we are not alone, either. Christ is our friend in the wilderness. He knows what it is to be hungry. He knows what it is to wish things were set right in all the kingdoms of the world. He knows what it is to have a body that can be hurt and even killed. Jesus fully and willingly shares those human experiences with us. Yet Jesus was never alone and friendless in the wilderness. And neither, thanks be to God, are you.

We share, with Jesus, the water of baptism and God's promise that we too are God's beloved children. And Jesus freely shares himself with us; as the bread in our wildernesses.

Jesus is God's person. And so are you.

Amen.