



Thoughts on the Journey

February 26, 2023 1st Sunday of Lent

Matthew 4:1-11

Suanne Gettings

"You're very special in the eyes of God!"

"You're a child of God, made in His image and likeness!"

"Jesus loved you so much that He died for you personally!"

These are all phrases I heard as I was growing up, but I have to admit they were just phrases that applied to all people who claimed to believe in God. In my mind, it wasn't a personal relationship that God had with me. My disbelief wasn't rooted in some displaced act of defiance or rebellion. I just don't think I was investing enough in my relationship with Christ to feel His presence. But, therein lies the crux of most temptation in my life - in that vast desert of my insecurity where I questioned God's profound love for me. Does God really have my back, or am I in this desert all alone?

If I could liken it to anything, it reminds me of the feeling you get when the lights go out and you're groping in the dark, trying to land your hands on anything that will give you a sense of where you are in relation to the rest of the objects in the room. You may grab one thing in the dark and it spills all over the floor. You may walk a little further and you jam your toe on the bed frame. Further still and you nearly take a knee out on the edge of the nightstand. And so it goes when you're stumbling in the dark. You grab whatever you can, looking for something that will make you feel safe, grounded, and back in control.

It is that very absence of trust in God's presence and our feeling of having to grope in the dark to find God, that leaves us open and vulnerable to temptation and sin. The irony is, we don't need to search for God at all; He found us long before we began searching for Him. After all, He created us! But even still, with God solidly within us, the devil is in the corner with his dog and pony show trying to distract us from what we already have. In his clever dance of deception, he is only too willing to oblige us in the search for God by giving us a false notion of real greatness. Satan feeds our hunger by dangling people and things in front of us to quench our loneliness - things that will never fill the void. We end up looking to things of this world to prop us up, to make us feel more valued, things that give us a false sense of wholeness and satisfaction. All the shallow worldly options, dangled in front of us, do nothing more than create restlessness prompting us to feverishly chase empty things, pulling our attention away from God.

In Matthew's Gospel, following Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert. It was there where Jesus was tempted by the devil. In

an effort to get Jesus to show the muscle of His Messiah-ship, he challenges Jesus with three temptations. After 40 days of fasting, being hungry, and perhaps feeling alone, the devil tries to taunt Jesus into changing a stone into bread. This sly prompting was less about bread and more about Jesus' security with who He is in relationship to his Father. Rather than Jesus demonstrating a cheap trick to prove to the devil His importance in the sight of His Father, He dismisses the devil by telling him,

"One does not live on bread alone,..."

The temptations continued as the devil took Him to the Holy City and made Him stand on the parapet of the temple. "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: *He will command his angels concerning you...*" Jesus answered him...

You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test."

Then the devil took Him high on a mountain and offered Him power over all the kingdoms of the world. Jesus then said to him,

"Get away, Satan! It is written: The Lord, your God, shall you worship, and him alone shall you serve."

With each temptation, the devil, on one level or another, twists the words of God to create doubt. Satan wanted Jesus to question His Father's love for Him. He also wanted Jesus to engage in a struggle for power. All three times the devil failed. All three times Jesus shuts down the devil's attempt to instill doubt about His Father's love by confirming His secure knowledge that His Father has His back.

As the devil tempted Jesus in the desert, he also tempts us today. He uses everything at his disposal to trick us into thinking that we either don't need God, that we're not loved by God, or that we're not valuable in the eyes of the Father. When these doubts creep in, we begin looking for some other person or thing to fill the void and Satan is only too happy to oblige us by dangling suspicion in one hand and false security in the other.

One important piece to this desert picture: Jesus did not go into the desert alone; following His baptism, He went filled with the Holy Spirit and angels ministered to Him. We, too, do not go on this journey alone. Like Jesus, we've been given the Holy Spirit as our Advocate in baptism. So, when you're in the desert and the devil is dangling doubt, remember that you are God's beloved child. Turn away from temptation and sin by trusting in God's infinite love for you. Our Lord never fails!