

“In the Wilderness”

Meditation based on Matthew 4:1-11

According to Greek mythology, Achilles was dipped headfirst in the River Styx, which made him immortal and invulnerable, except for the heel by which he was held, which was not immersed. He later suffered a mortal wound to that very spot, his vulnerable spot. What is our Achilles heel when it comes to temptation?

It has been said that Satan is quick to notice our Achilles heel when it comes to the subject of sin and temptation. As we recall the story of Jesus' encounter with Satan in the wilderness, I share with you from the Discipleship Journal these results from a survey several years ago that asked people to rank their spiritual challenges. The top five results were as follows:

1. Materialism
2. Pride
3. Self-centeredness
4. Laziness
5. (Tie) Anger/Bitterness & Sexual Lust

Spiritual challenges, temptation or whatever we would like to call them is something we face daily in our lives.

Today we have entered the church season of Lent. Lent is not the church season of celebration like Advent leading up to Jesus' birth. Lent is a season of soul searching and repentance leading up to the death of Jesus. It is a season for reflection and taking an inventory of our spiritual lives.

Our gospel lesson from Matthew is a reminder that Jesus too faced temptation. Jesus went into the wilderness to meet Satan face to face. Satan himself tempted the Son of God to change rules and achieve goals in a way contrary to what God had planned. There was more than Jesus' character at stake on the sandy plains of Palestine, for forty days, human history hung in the balance. Satan proposed to Jesus a more enticing opportunity over what God had planned for Jesus. Satan tempted Jesus toward the good parts of being human without the bad, to savor the taste of bread without being subject to the fixed rules of hunger, to confront risk with no real danger, to enjoy fame and power without being rejected.

Satan was offering Jesus the chance to be perhaps a more powerful Messiah. Satan offered Jesus the crown without the cross and without the suffering he would have to endure under God's plan. Yet Jesus chose to be the suffering servant. For this reason, we have been called to live and called to love others as Christ so loves us.

Traditionally in the Moravian Church the first Sunday of Lent has been a Sunday in which Holy Communion is observed and celebrated. Today is also a unique day in the history of our denomination. Not only is your pastor Jerry away celebrating his 70th birthday, but we Moravians are celebrating the 563rd anniversary of our founding on this very day of March 1st!

The season of Lent provides each of us a time to focus upon our spiritual lives. It is the time during which we not only prepare ourselves to celebrate the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus, but also the death and resurrection that constantly takes place around us. Life has been described as a continuing process of the death of the old and familiar, and being reborn again into a new hope, trust, and love.

The survey concerning spiritual challenges that I shared earlier had a second part that asked people how they resisted those temptations. Survey respondents noted temptations were more dangerous when they had neglected their time with God (81 percent) and when they were physically tired (57 percent). Spending more time with God and getting more rest seem like easy enough prescriptions. However people also responded that they resisted temptation through prayer (84 percent), avoiding compromising situations (76 percent), Bible study (66 percent), and being accountable to someone (52 percent).

My prayer for us this Lenten season is that it will certainly be a time of solitude and self-reflection upon our spiritual lives but also a time of community and fellowship, a time of listening for God's voice and a time to pay attention to other people's needs.

With grateful hearts, let us now come to the Lord's Table to celebrate Communion.

The Rev. Dr. David A. Marcus, Jr.
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