

February 26, 2023: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ **First Sunday in Lent** ~

"Let us worship the Lord our God!"

Our services can be found on our website at www.barrechurch.com

Scripture Reading: Matthew 4 v 1-11

I. Introduction:

It is so wonderful, and important to spend time alone, especially when life gets busy and the demands of life become too much for us; and we need that break, and time away from it all. Those times away, in silence perhaps, or just slowing down with loved ones, can bring such rejuvenation and peace and rest. We can think clearer, and we feel ready to face life after a period like that.

II. The Spirit led Him into the desert.

In our passage Matthew describes how Jesus is being led by the Spirit of God into the desert to be tempted by the devil. This sounds a bit strange that He would be sent by God for this purpose, but God is the One whose agenda this is, and who is with Him. As one theologian says, "the Divine sovereignty controls the story". Jesus is sent there to fast and pray for forty days and forty nights. His time in the desert would not be peaceful as we see Him at other times when He would leave the crowd behind and find a quiet space to be with God. This is different. He would eat no food, and would find himself in rough terrain, relying on God to be with Him and give Him strength. At the end of the forty days and nights of fasting, he naturally became hungry. It is at this point when He was at His weakest physically when He would be tempted by the devil, but in essence be tested by God. In the Old Testament we see the people of Israel traveling through the desert as well to get to the land promised to them by God. They would get hungry, thirsty and agitated with Moses, be tempted to worship other idols, but in essence being tested by God as well. We see how they constantly struggle to keep their faith, and how God would come through to be there, provide for them and encourage them on their journey.

It would be easy for Jesus to just give in to this first temptation, to turn the stones into bread. He would have the power to do it, and then He would have something to eat. Jesus, however, is on the alert when He quotes the scripture from Deuteronomy 8 v 3, saying, "It is written, Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." That is not enough for Satan to leave Him alone, but followed it up with two more temptations, to throw Himself down from the highest place in the temple, while quoting Psalm 91, which says, "He will command His angels concerning You and they will lift You up in their arms...", to which Jesus responds saying, "It is also written: Do not put the Lord Your God to the test". With the final temptation suggesting that he would give all the kingdoms of the world to Jesus, should He bow down to him and worship him, Jesus had enough of this, and through the power of the Holy Spirit in Him he demanded that Satan leave Him right now, and again quoted a text from Deuteronomy 6 v 13, "For it is written, Worship the Lord Your God, and serve Him only." I have made my choice, because I am the Son of God, and as the Son of God, I worship my God. So, leave! And we see it is written that Satan left Him. Worshipping him would mean turning away from God, who had stayed with Him and strengthened Him during these forty days of fasting and praying. His commitment to God was so strong, that He would not be tempted into idolatry. His was a struggle between worshipping God and worshipping Satan while dealing with His hunger! And when he left Him, Jesus was then surrounded by God's angels who attended to Him. They gave Him food to eat, and water to drink. God entered at the right time because God's Son chose to worship God alone! What a drama, what wrestling between God and Satan.

It is written in Isaiah 13 v 21 that the desert or wilderness is a place where demons reside. But the desert is also the place where God reminds the people of God to trust God, to not forget the Lord. It is a place of divine provision, of raining manna, and it is a place where their faith and their belief in God is tested.

III. Conclusion: Our own desert experiences

We may not physically find ourselves in the desert, or wilderness, meaning we have more access to food and water, and the things we need and enjoy on a day-to-day basis. We have more comfort where we are in our homes, our neighborhoods, our stores nearby, and the

conveniences our towns offer. There are however those around us who do not have access to food and shelter, or enough money for heating oil in the winter. It is true, though, that we all go through experiences that sometimes make us feel like we are far away from help.

Lent is the time in the life of the church to bring the focus of Christ in the wilderness, fasting and praying into our own thinking and experiences. It is a reminder of the suffering He would endure, giving His life for us and our salvation. It is a time to pray and fast if we can medically, of course. It is a time to bring our stuff to God, the challenges, the temptations, the things that hold us back in our spiritual lives. It is a time to grow closer to God, and to deepen our relationship with God.

Maybe during this period of Lent all we can find moments in our daily lives to spend a little extra time with God in prayer. Maybe we can do some fasting, giving up something, or incorporating something special for the sake of our growth with God. Whatever we decide, this is a time to spend time with God in silence and allow God to be with us, strengthen us and guide us on our journeys. It is also a time where we say to those things that hold us back, to leave us Now, and to make our decisions to worship God here at church and in our homes. Let the church music play a little more in our homes and let our hearts sing while we wait and see how God shows up and bless us like the angels did with Christ. Amen!