

March 6, 2022  
First Sunday in Lent  
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH  
Pastor Joel Sutton

Luke 4:1-13

JESUS RESCUES YOU FROM THE WILDERNESS OF SIN.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St Luke, the 4th chapter, which you heard read earlier.

A 2017 Pew Research Center survey found that the main reason people regularly attend religious services is “to feel closer to God.” The other popular reasons listed were to give their children a moral foundation, to become better people, and for comfort in times of trouble or sorrow. (<https://www.pewforum.org/2018/08/01/why-americans-go-to-religious-services/>)

Unfortunately, much of American Christianity has lost its way. The primary focus of many churches is on giving the customer what they want: entertainment, personal relationships in which to share the good times and the bad, and a motivational talk that makes them feel good about themselves and feel closer to God. And that doesn't take into account all those who say they can be Christian apart from gathering for worship.

Why do you come to church? Christians gather to worship because they are they are broken and sick and dying. You and me and all mankind are lost in a wilderness of transgression and slowly dying from a poisonous disease called sin. We *need* to be rescued. And if we *are not* rescued, we will be eternally lost into the wilderness abyss of hell.

This is why Jesus is in the wilderness with the devil. He wouldn't let the devil have his way with you. He loves you too much to leave you in the wilderness. He cannot stay in the peace and glory of heaven while you're here suffering. It was necessary for Jesus to suffer and defeat all the devil's temptations in the wilderness for you. And while the devil would wait for an opportune time in hopes of better success, at the right time, while you were still weak, Christ Jesus would defeat the unholy trinity of sin, death, and the devil on your behalf, by His suffering and death on the cross, and resurrection on the third day. (cf: Romans 5:6)

The Christian Church does not exist to make you feel good about yourself. This place, this Christian Church, is here for one reason: for God to expose and remove your sin. Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees:

***“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. <sup>32</sup> I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”*** (Luke 5:31–32)

That's the only business of the Church. That's why you're here... or least should be. The purpose of the Christian Church is the proclamation of Law and Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. The Divine Service is not something you do for God. It is God's service to you. It is where our Holy Triune God comes to you and feeds you His lifesaving medication of forgiveness of sins, new life in Christ, and eternal salvation.

Unfortunately, many people who call themselves Christian, don't take sin seriously. But Scripture teaches that you and I and all mankind are enemies of God, each the chief of poor miserable sinners. (cf: Romans 5:8–10; 1 Timothy 1:15) If something is not done, your sin is going to drive you out of heaven and into hell forever where there **will be** weeping and gnashing of teeth. (cf: Luke 13:28) You are infected with the poison of sin and in need of God's divine blood transfusion of deliverance and grace. His Church is the only spiritual hospital for terminally sin-sick people in a suffering and dying world. It is where the great Physician keeps you alive, nourishes, and sustains in faith through His Word and His sacraments. Apart from Christ and His Church you and I are of all people most to be pitied. (cf: 1 Corinthians 15:19)

Scripture also teaches that regardless of how good you have it or how good, pious, and holy you believe yourself to be, sin corrupts and destroys you from the inside. It's woven within the very fabric of your being, festering in your deepest parts and abandons your decaying body in the wilderness of sin and death. (cf: Psalm 51: 5; John 3:6; Romans 5:18)

You feel it in your body and see it in your relationships. Your body is physically deteriorating while your relationships are filled with jealousy and grudges, suspicion, anger and disappointment. If you have ever been sick or had an infection, or ever been rejected, or suffered an accident – these things are not God's judgment on you for specific sins. They are evidence of the sin within you and signs that you live in a wilderness sin. It's on all people, on all creation. They're the DNA and fingerprints that sin leaves on the crime scene of your life. You're lost and dying, wandering in the wilderness forever.

In our Gospel text, it is no accident that Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. At His baptism, God spoke from the heavens saying:

***“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”*** (Luke 3:22)

Immediately after His Baptism He is led into the wilderness and the devil goes straight after God's testimony, questioning His Word using the word ***“if”***. Satan the accuser, demanded proof.

***“... If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.”*** (Luke 4:3)

***“...If you... .. worship me... [all of this] will... be yours.”*** (Luke 4:7)

***“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here... [God's angels will] ... guard you.”*** (Luke 4:9-10)

Satan is good at what he does. He comes to find you in your wilderness. He stalks you and waits until you are weakened and fragile. He finds you when you are tired and beaten down to the point where your emotions are so weak that you're convinced that you are ruined and condemned. Then! That is when Satan puts you on the witness stand as he rattles off his ***“if”*** questions: ***“If there really is a God...”*** ***“If God really loved you...”***

It's no accident that Jesus is in the wilderness. It's a part of His journey to the cross, a part His of His active obedience for your sake. For forty days, the devil does his worst to the fast-weakened and famished Jesus. But the perfect Jesus isn't swayed by appetite, power, or pride.

It's instructive to notice that the devil only gives conditionally, whereas God always gives unconditionally. The devil must have worship first before he pretends to give what is not his to give. God, however, freely gives His grace unconditionally and is *then* worshiped. Christian worship is not something you do for God. It is God's service to you. It is where our Holy Triune God comes to you and feeds you His lifesaving medication forgiveness of sins, new life in Christ, and eternal salvation. And because He first serves you, you respond with thanksgiving and praise.

The devil's promises are always lies. He promised Adam and Eve that they would become like God. They didn't. He promised Judas thirty pieces of silver. Judas tried to return the money. And for everything he has promised you, you are still stuck in a wilderness of suffering and pain.

This is why Jesus is in the wilderness with the devil. He wouldn't let the devil have his way with you. He loves you too much to leave you in the wilderness. He cannot stay in the peace and glory of heaven while you are here suffering. So, He comes in the flesh to be with you in your wilderness. Like you, He's alone. Like you, He's thirsty and hungry and miserable. Like you – He too is on His way to die. But He's never sinned. His flesh and bone and heart and soul are pure and holy.

Jesus comes to this barren place – hungry, tempted, and suffering to rescue you from your wilderness. He's not in the wilderness to empathize with you – just so He can say: *"This is pretty bad, isn't it?"* He's here to do what you can't. He's here to heal your broken heart and to bind up your wounds. (cf: Psalm 147:3) Even while sin wrecks you and death claims you, and you cry out:

***"Who will deliver me from this body of death?"*** (Romans 7:24-25)

... you can faithfully proclaim:

***Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"*** (Romans 7:24-25)

The message of Jesus' temptation is not that *"Jesus went into the wilderness and resisted the devil to be an example of how to resist the devil."* It's not to tell you that if Jesus can do it so can you. If that's the message, the devil has already won because he has deceived you into believing that you're a lot better of a person than you really are, with no need of a Savior.

You and I fail in temptation at every point, so someone had to overcome every temptation on our behalf. Christ Jesus is your substitute, not just in His passive obedience of suffering and dying, but also in His perfect active obedience of keeping God's Law perfectly and resisting temptation. Because of His obedience, God forgives your sins and credits you with the righteousness of Christ.

You're saved by the blood of a sinless man. He's the spotless Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. (cf: John 1:29) He shed His blood on the cross to pay the price to rescue from your wilderness of your sin. So when Satan comes to you in your desert to attack and tempt you with his conditional offers, you can trust in the unconditional promises of Jesus, who saved you by His perfect obedience, suffering, and death.

When the devil comes in deception, you can trust in Jesus' Word of truth. When death demands your life, you trust in Jesus promise:

***“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”*** (John 11:25-26)

Until Jesus takes you home to glory, the devil is not finished with you. He wants you to believe that since Jesus has resisted temptation perfectly for you – you no longer have to try to resist. He says: *“Just go ahead and give in and sin, because the Lord will bail you out.”* **No!** Our Lord commands you to resist temptation and flee from sin. Every temptation and sin is an attempt by the devil to destroy your faith. If you just go ahead and willingly give into that temptation, then you're getting deceived by desire.

***“Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”*** (James 1:15)

The more attracted you are to a sin, the less you want to confess it and be forgiven. Eventually, giving in to the temptation becomes so important or seductive that you're willing to abandon faith and forgiveness to keep it.

Flee from sin. Jesus came into your wilderness to rescue you. **Do not** despise the blood Christ shed to redeem you and set you free from sin. A bloody Savior on the cross drives you to contrition and repentance. Willfully and freely indulging in the sin that Christ has died to set you free from is a grave offense to God. So:

[“... come, let us fix our eyes on] ***Jesus,***  
***the founder and perfecter of our faith,***  
***who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross...***” (Hebrews 12:2)

While wondering lost in the dry, hot, wilderness of your sin, Jesus comes to nourish and feed you. He comes to you in this place in Word and Sacrament, unconditionally giving. That's why you come to worship. It's gathering so that God would serve you.

***“[He is] the bread of life; whoever comes to [Him] shall not hunger, and whoever believes in [Him] shall never thirst.”*** (John 6:35)

He is living water.

***“... whoever drinks of the water that [Jesus gives]... will never be thirsty again.”*** (John 4:14)

His Baptismal waters to save you from your wilderness of your sin. He is:

***“... the bread of life; whoever comes to [Him] shall not hunger.”*** (John 6:34)

His body and blood given and shed for you forgive your sins and strengthen your faith to resist the assaults of the evil one.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, take heart. A mighty fortress is our God, who comes to the wilderness to save sinners.

***“Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.”*** (Romans 10:11)

***“... everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*** (Romans 10:13)

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,  
Amen.