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“Where do we go from here?” **Sermon on Luke 4:1-13**

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First Sunday in Lent

Being led by the Holy Spirit. Filled with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is not something Presbyterians talk about a lot, especially on Spring Break Sundays and when the time changes. I suspect because Presbyterians through the ages have taken the Apostle Paul at his word when he said to that overly spiritualized church in Corinth, “Settle down! Settle down! Let’s ease up on the speaking in tongues, and let’s put away the idol of that exclusive, elusive spiritual knowledge, and “Let all things in the church be done decently and in order.” This translates to Presbyterians as, “If it isn’t in the bulletin, don’t do it!”

This makes this season in the lectionary cycle more challenging because we are in the Gospel of Luke. A Gospel that has Jesus born of the Spirit, receiving the Holy Spirit at his baptism, and today, being led by the Spirit into the wilderness.

Being led by the Spirit isn’t on my agenda, but it is on God’s. On this first Sunday in Lent, we are in the Gospel of Luke, Luke 4: 1-13.

Luke 4:1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.’ Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, “One does not live by bread alone.” ’

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, ‘To you I will give their glory and all

this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.' Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him." '

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you", and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."' Jesus answered him, 'It is said, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."' When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Much of the pastor's life is listening to people, helping people, hoping for people to find a path forward.

"Pastor, I lost my job and have two kids in private school. Where do I go from here?"

"Pastor, my spouse has been cheating on me, and I'm so angry. Where do I go from here?"

"Pastor, the word I got from the doctor is that I have an aggressive cancer. I'm not sure where to go from here."

If you've never wondered about the path forward, chances are you haven't lived long enough.

Or you're oblivious to the multitude of societal and political changes that are and will impact your life, your retirement, and the lives of your children yet unborn. What is this thing called "Bitcoin?" Is it the wave of the future, or is it a Ponzi scheme? What is this thing called "AI"? What does it mean when computers can learn on their own? Drones and robots - all progressing in the milliseconds. What is this monster we are creating? It's always been the question.

Back in 1818, a writer named Mary Shelly authored a novel called Frankenstein, a novel about an out-of-control creation. Written in 1818, but so fitted for our time. And I do like the line she wrote: "No man chooses evil because it is evil, he only mistakes it for happiness, the good he seeks."

No one chooses evil because it is evil; we only mistake evil for happiness, the good that we seek. That is the definition of temptation, when one confuses evil for good. When we can no longer tell the difference between evil and good, where do we go from here?

When we can no longer... I said that because I'd like to think there was a time when the majority of people could see evil and recognize good. There was a time that a majority of people knew the truth.

As our Declaration of Independence says, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with

certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

There was a day when Truth was self-evident. But when those words were written, “all men” didn’t really mean “All men” or “all people.” Some men and women were property at the time. Women didn’t get to vote until 1920.

But I’d still like to think that there was a time when truth was self-evident. When there was some North Star, that we could all agree, when we all knew the words and the tune, and we sang them together.

When I was in college, Sting sang, “The Russians love their children, too.”
When I was four, The Beatles sang, “All you need is love.”
Before I was born, someone sang, “You are to love your God with all your heart, mind, strength and soul... And love your neighbor as yourself.”

Surely there was a time when we knew that truth was self-evident, everyone was on the same page, and we knew where we were going.

Jesus, fresh from his Baptism, was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness where he was tempted by the devil for 40 days. He didn’t know where he was going. He was being led. He didn’t know where he was going, but he knew where he was going.

Let me explain. He was being tempted by the devil. Now, get the vision out of your head of that red devil, pitchfork, and tail. If that thing was leading you, that’s not being tempted. That’s just doing wrong. The definition of temptation is as Mary Shelly wrote: “No man chooses evil because it is evil, he only mistakes it for happiness, the good he seeks.”

You see, the temptation of Jesus wasn’t to be bad, it was to be God. “Use your power to be in power!” “Jesus, how long has it been since you have had something to eat? That can’t be healthy.” Nothing wrong with turning a rock into a loaf of bread. No one is going to miss one less rock in the world. Be God!

“Jesus, why on earth are you being so human? Show people that the government rests upon your shoulders. Take over the world! Be God!”

Show the people how powerful you are. Why, you’re indestructible! Jump off the pinnacle of the temple; it will be quite a show, those angels lifting you up on eagle’s wings! Be God!

The temptation isn’t to be bad. The temptation is to be God. Do you remember the story in Genesis and what the snake said in the garden, “Eat! Eat! You will not die; you will be like God.”

“No one chooses evil because it is evil, one only mistakes it for happiness, the good one Seeks.”

Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. He didn’t know where he was going. He was being led. But there with the devil, he knew where he was going, he was being led by the Word of God. That north star! That truth!

The temptation is to be powerful. And Jesus chose to be weak. The temptation is to be full of yourself and Jesus chose to be hungry. The temptation is to be the most powerful force, and he chose to be powerless. He didn't know where he was going. But he knew where he was going. He had a north star; he had a truth.

One doesn't live by bread alone. Rather, we live by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Jesus knew the Word of God. Held onto it in his heart, so that when he was in the valley of the shadow of death, he would fear no evil. Though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea, there is a river that makes glad the City of God.

When there's no help to be found, I lift mine eyes to the hills. From whence does my help come? My help comes from the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth in this chaotic world. In a world that seems to show more and more the absence of God, where do we go from here? There's always a choice.

I can't think of a more opportune time to trust the Word of God. Hold fast to that which is good. Render to no one evil for evil. Strengthen the faint hearted, support the weak, honor all people. Love and serve the Lord. Chase those demons into their holes. And if they return at an opportune time, what will you say? There's always a choice.

"Father, take this cup from me." Is that what you'll say? I don't want to be human. I don't want to die for all the right reasons. I want my life to be about the wrong reasons.

Father, take this cup from me. Or will you know that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope. And hope does disappoint us.

Led by the Spirit, living out the Word... that's where we go from here. We know where we are going!

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