

WGUMC Lent 1 February 17, 2013 Luke 4:1-13  
"Into the Wilderness"

Last week, Schuyler Rhodes talked about keeping it real. And that is going to be our Lenten discipline this year. We are going into the wilderness with Jesus for forty days. What should we take with us? My husband would want to take lots of maps. The only problem is that there are no maps for the soul, only a compass, and that is Jesus Christ. We would want to take plenty of water with us, but our water bottles would soon be empty. There is no water in this wilderness except Living Water. So don't bother with the bottles. I don't know about you, but I would be worried about what I'm going to eat, and I can't carry that much food. I fast once a week, but I won't make it for forty days. Then I remember the scripture Jesus quoted that says, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."

[Deuteronomy 8:3] So, whatever wilderness it is that you are

slogging through, let the Word be your food for the next forty days.

We have all we need. We're ready, and the Word for today is the story of Jesus tempted by the devil in the wilderness. But it doesn't start out with the devil. Notice that it starts out with the Spirit of God. It is the Spirit that leads Jesus into the wilderness. In the Gospel of Mark, the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness. So here's the first lesson: if you find yourself in a spiritual wasteland, don't think that God has nothing to do with your being there. The question to ask is this: "What does God want me to learn while I'm here?"

The Hebrews wandered in the wilderness for forty years to figure out who they were and whose they were. Jesus did it in forty days. In some ways, Jesus going into the wilderness was like going on a vision quest or an Outward Bound adventure. There are things we need to know about ourselves that we are never going to learn if we never go outside of our

comfort zone. I kept thinking about the folks on that cruise ship that limped into port this past week. You don't think of taking a cruise as leaving your comfort zone, but from the sound and smell of it, I bet folks learned a lot about themselves and everyone else as well out there in that watery wilderness.

We won't learn what we need to know without being tested. The word temptation comes from a Latin word meaning *to test, to try*. So temptation isn't necessarily a bad thing. You won't know who you are in relation to the forces around you if you never let them test you. In that sense, the devil did Jesus a favor.

The devil put on his own Unreality Show. First, he tempted Jesus with material comforts. "You can make hunger disappear by turning these stones into bread." In that testing, Jesus learned that he didn't come just to give bread, but to be the Bread of Life.

Next, the devil tempted Jesus with authority over all the kingdoms of the world. The devil offered Jesus the power of kingdom. But Jesus rejected that offer. He chose instead the power of the cross.

Now, both times, Jesus quoted the Word of God to defend against the words of the devil. Finally, the devil quotes scripture to tempt Jesus. And how did he tempt him? With notoriety. Be spectacular. Be a star. Get on the cover of People Magazine. But Jesus didn't come to be a superhero. He came to be a savior. When Jesus answered, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test,'" he was saying to the devil, "It's no use. You're done here. The road ahead is crystal clear. I know who I am and I know what I have to do." That's why Jesus had to go into the wilderness, and why we sometimes have to.

In the Lenten devotional that I passed out last week, I asked you to think about times in your life that you've been in the wilderness, spiritually outside of your comfort zone, a time

when you've been tried and tested. When we get out there, we don't always know why we're there or what we're supposed to learn. We don't always see what God is doing, and we sometimes go looking for God in all the wrong places. We can be led astray by all kinds of things, not just by money, power, or fame. Heck, we can make a god out of anything: our spouse, our kids, our exercise routine. This is a good argument for memorizing some scripture passages, so that we have them at the ready to unmask all of those false gods we run into along the way.

I believe that everyone has been in a spiritual wilderness and that some of us are there now. So, in the interest of keeping it real, I've invited someone to share about a wilderness experience they've had. And I pray that you will hear in their words, the Word of God for you today.