“The Wandering Way” (First in the series “The Way)
Luke 3:21-22; Luke 4:1-13
February 22, 2026 (First Sunday in Lent)
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Luke 3:21-22
Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’

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.

Sermon

On Wednesday, we began our journey through the season of Lent with our Ash Wednesday service. Today we continue our journey through the season of Lent – a season lasting 40 days, not including Sundays.

It's traditional on the first Sunday in Lent to read and reflect upon the beginning of Jesus' journey from his baptism and subsequent temptation by the devil in the wilderness. You've already picked up that Jesus was **tempted for 40 days**; thus we have the 40 days of Lent.

We all know something of temptation. The temptations we face vary throughout our lives. As we wander through this life of ours, we are tempted to deny our identity as people of God, we are tempted to deny our mission in this world, we are tempted to sell out and to give up.

Jesus was baptized. In his baptism, his identity and his mission were announced. "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Then, he was led into the wilderness, where for 40 days he was tempted by the devil." During those 40 days Jesus did not eat anything. He fasted. It's an understatement to say that Jesus was famished. With that, came vulnerability. It was an opportune moment for the devil to tempt him.

When are we most vulnerable to succumbing to temptation? Sometimes it comes for us after a significant spiritual event when we've felt particularly close to God. Sometimes it's when we're pumped up with so much confidence that we believe we don't need God. We are tempted by pride. On the other hand, it can be when we've been put down and we are questioning our value, our identity, and our purpose in life.

Sometimes it is when we are overly tired or overly taxed with stress. Sometimes it's when we've neglected caring for ourselves and our relationships. Sometimes it's when we've not had times of worship, prayer, study, and Christian fellowship. Sometimes we can't explain it when we find ourselves vulnerable to temptation.

While Jesus never succumbed to temptation, he was indeed tempted. And it was an opportune time after he had been in the wilderness with no food for 40 days. He was physically weak and perhaps felt the haze of confusion. Perhaps he was spiritually and emotionally spent.

Naturally, the first temptation was food related. "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread."

IF is an important word here. Right off the bat, the devil is introducing an **IF** – an **IF** about Jesus' identity. "**If** you are the Son of God . . ." "Ifs" introduce doubt. Jesus has just been reminded by God at his baptism: "You **ARE** my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased." But the devil says: "Are you sure?"

It happens to us, too. One of the main ways we are tempted is **to forget who we are and whose we are**. We are tempted with the **"IF**" – a hint of doubt about our identity. It introduces the question of whether we really are children of God and whether we belong to God. **IF, IF, IF** . . . we tend to hear rather than God saying: "There are no ifs, ands, or buts; you are a child of God. You belong to God. This is your identity. Claim it. Live it. Embrace it." But the devil likes to make us doubt who we are and whose we are. And it all begins there. Jesus did not succumb to this nonsense, but sometimes we do. We start to believe that we don't belong to God or anyone.

The devil says: "Command this stone to become a loaf of bread." What's wrong with that? What's the big deal? It was desirable and needed by Jesus. It was also desirable and needed by the people around him who needed food. He could address food insecurity. He could "take that on the road." Later in his ministry, Jesus would miraculously feed thousands of people. However, that would be on his terms, not the devil's.

Jesus rejected the devil's invitation to perform a miracle out of self-interest. Professor Warren Carter summarizes it this way: "If Jesus acts on the devil's bidding, he becomes the agent or son of the devil. He ceases to be the agent or son of God. He would betray his identity." (workingpreacher.org)

Next, the devil says **IF** you will worship me, Jesus, I will give you all the **kingdoms of the world**. Just worship me. This is perplexing to us. If Jesus' identity was that of an earthly king, of course he would want all the kingdoms of the world. What king doesn't like to amass and take over other kingdoms – as many as possible? But that was not Jesus' identity or his mission. He would not be like any earthly king. He would not amass or take over other kingdoms. He would not wear a golden crown or elegant robes. He would wear a crown of thorns and be stripped of his meager garments and mocked with kingly garb. Jesus would inaugurate a New Kingdom. He would inaugurate a Kingdom of love, a Kingdom of justice, a Kingdom of servanthood and sacrifice.

The devil tempted Jesus to take the easy way – a way that didn't involve love, justice, servanthood, sacrifice, or death on a cross. None of these things happen **"in an instant"** like the devil was promising all the kingdoms of the world **"in an instant**." These things don't usually bring glory and all authority. Being loving, seeking justice, serving others, sacrificing oneself for others is considered weak, wimpy, even stupid.

We like things **"in an instant."** We like "strong" leaders – not people who love, seek justice, serve others, or sacrifice for others. We want

someone to solve OUR problems without regard for others, and we want it done fast . . . in an instant. Jesus said “No”. He would not worship the devil. He would not forget his identity. He would not compromise or water down his mission. He had come to save the world from bondage to sin through dying and rising again . . . through love. He did not come to be an earthly king to offer instant gratification, especially at the expense of anyone who would be left out. Jesus said NO to being popular among the people by simply giving them what they wanted.

The final temptation starts in a similar way with the Devil’s **“IF”. IF** you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here on the top of the temple. That would be cool. That would solidify your power. That would even fulfill scripture, the devil said.

Before this, only Jesus has quoted scripture. But now the devil gives it a try. Jump, Jesus. The angels will catch you. This will seal the deal with the people. You will be their king for sure.

Jesus resists another easy way to avoid his true mission – that of living the next three years of life as a servant leader and dying on the cross for the salvation of the world. The devil’s way would have been easier. Jesus would have been “Time’s Person of the Year” and won awards for his superpowers.

We are tempted throughout our lives to “forget who we are and whose we are.” Again and again, we hear “IF” “IF you are a child of God and belong to God. Messages in ads and from other people tend to tell us that we are not worthy. Some people even tell us we are not worthy of being God’s child. We are not enough. We are not good enough. We are not enough.” We are tempted to forget our identity.

As Christians, we are constantly tempted to forget our mission. We are tempted to take an easier path than a path of love for God and others. We are tempted to adore power and to bow down to it. We are tempted to be selfish. We are tempted to isolate ourselves and to disregard the needs and pain of others. We are tempted to forget our calling to tell others about Jesus. We are tempted to avoid the Bible because it challenges us. We are tempted to avoid worship because “everybody at worship is a hypocrite” Or, we avoid worship because we’ve bought into the lie that “only those who have all the answers can come.” We are tempted to follow the crowd even when the crowd is following one who is not following God. We are tempted to avoid complexity. We are tempted to avoid suffering and sacrifice. We are tempted to deafen our eyes and blind our eyes to the cries of people in need. The list goes on and on.

Amid our temptations, we may even be tempted to give up on God or on ourselves. Sometimes we succumb to those temptations.

Remember today that God does not give up on us. God continues to love us and to call us his children. God continues to call us back, to run toward us with open arms, and to work on our lives. “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Remember who you are and remember to whom you belong in body and soul, in life and in death to our gracious Savior Jesus Christ.

There are no **“IFs, ands or buts”** when it comes to who we are and to whom we belong. Be convinced.