

“Wilderness Companions” Luke 4:1-13 2/21/2010 Kenmore UMC

**J**ourney with us, O God, through this day, through this season. May we follow your leading and draw strength from your presence beside us. And in those times and places we feel alone, help us to trust you still as Companion and Savior. Amen.

What an ominous way to end a story. It is really frightening, or it should be.

***When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.***

It is bad enough that the story ends with the reality that the devil is always lurking there, waiting to test Jesus again, what is really scary is that the devil is there waiting to tempt all those followers of Jesus who find their life in him. That would be your and I, and Ethan and every other child we have ever baptized in the waters of Jesus life, death and resurrection.

The only thing more frightening than the devil lurking, waiting for an opportunity, is that we are so focused on the tests that we don't even notice the most significant line of all, *the devil is waiting for an opportune time.*

Louis Smedes captures this double jeopardy we face in this way. He writes, “Nobody ever says, “I think I will lie to myself today.” This is the double treachery of self-deception: First we deceive ourselves, and then we convince ourselves that we are not deceiving ourselves.”

(If I could read and hear your thoughts, like I can my own, I just know there is someone who is saying, I would not and do not do that.)

Do you remember the old joke about the apprentice plumber who was taken during his training to see Niagara Falls? When he saw the water rushing and gushing everywhere, thought for a few moments and then said, “I could fix that.”

The devil offers Jesus three opportunities to “fix that.” That is both specific and general.

Jesus fasted, he is hungry (the world is hungry) and Jesus is tempted with turning a stone into bread.

Jesus has come to change the world, to show the world the way to live and the devil says to him, “I will give you authority and power over to them if you will worship me.

Jesus is taken by the devil to the pinnacle of the temple for a dramatic demonstration of the power of God.

And in each instance Jesus says no.

We do not survive by bread alone, we worship God only, and we do not put God to the test.

And Jesus begins his public ministry.

If we have entered into Jesus' temptation at all, we all breathe a sign of relief; everything is going to be all right.

Not just for Jesus, but for us. If we can pass the test, get through the trial, resist the temptation we are set.

But we forget,

***When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.***

We live in a wilderness of temptation, if we are to resist them and discover the Garden of Life God has also given us to live in and enjoy, then we need Wilderness Companions.

We need the Word of God, We need the bread of Life, and we need God's people. We need each other.

We need to study and grow together, we need to Worship together, we need to serve together.

When we took Ethan to introduce him to his new family we were not only committing ourselves and this church body to nurturing Ethan, we were renewing our commitment to each other. To be there for each other and to reach out to each other for help.

We offered to be a companion to Ethan and each other, and we committed to asking for help when we needed a companion to see us through the struggles.

We are Wilderness Companions for each other, just as Jesus is our companion on the road of life, just as Jesus turned to and relied on the companionship of God's Word and God's Spirit to see him through this temptation in the wilderness as a prelude to his ministry and as he turned to God's Spirit for wisdom, guidance and strength in his greatest temptation in the Garden of Gethsemane which we will remember at the end of our Lenten journey.

Jesus broke open his heart to rely on God's Word and God's Spirit and in so doing was able to be a companion to all those he taught and healed and set free, and to all those who have become his body, the church today.

The opportune time for the devil is ever before and around us.

Let us take advantage of this Lent season, this gift of God of forty days to examine ourselves, to break open our hearts to One who is our Wilderness Companion, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.