Time in the Wilderness
Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Luke 4:1-13

In looking at today's gospel lesson we see Jesus seeking to live into his identity as the "chosen" child of God or as God's "Beloved" son. We find Jesus in the wilderness face to face not just with the physical and emotional challenges of being isolated, but confronted with the presence of the devil**. They have an exchange of dialogue in which we see that** the devil knows the Bible and can recite it quite well. So well in fact, he uses the words to put Jesus to the test, "but Jesus knows more than what the Bible says. Jesus knows how to do what the Bible **says, which is how he passes his wilderness exam."**[1] Jesus knows who his Creator is and what the expectations are of him. Not just to know the words of the Bible, but to live them.

"When it's our turn, none of us is going to get the Son of God test. We're going to get the regular old Adam and Eve test, which means that **the devil won't need much more than an** all you can eat buffet and a tax refund to turn our heads."[2]

Let us look at where Jesus was tested – the wilderness. I am sure that every one of us has **experienced the wilderness. Maybe it looked** like the death of a child, or a hospital waiting room, or perhaps it was a divorce, or the never-ending pile of bills on your kitchen table. You knew that you were in the **wilderness because you felt empty and all the resources** you had used in the past to get through a time of crisis seemed useless. In those dark-night of the soul **times you try to pray and you can't even formulate** a sentence. It seems as though words have simply escaped you.

While getting my hair done on yesterday the hairdresser shared with me that her children are bi-racial. Her eldest son who is five (5) years old **asked her, "Mommy, why is daddy**

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[1] Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor. "The Wilderness Exam" Luke 4:1-13; 1st Sunday of Lent – Year C. February 21, 2010
[2] Ibid

called black when he is actually brown? Why is Demarion, his 3 year old brother, light in skin like you and I am dark like daddy? Does that mean that I am daddy's son because I am dark like **him and Demarion is your son because he is light like** you?" She said she tried explaining that they had different skin tones because they had a mother who is actually "Caucasian" not white and a dad who is African American not black. To which her 5 year old promptly replied, but mom if you mix black and white **you get gray not brown like me. The logic of a child** trying to figure out who he belonged to and how he was created in a world that tells him he must claim **an identity that doesn't fit with current cultural** standards or cultural classifications. A child's wilderness experience. A child seeking to position himself to do the will of his parent or his creator.

No, no one wants to journey **through the wilderness where we are greeted** by emptiness and sand and a Bible-quoting devil. We spend time, money, and expend energy to **avoid the wilderness. Yet if we pause for** a moment and reflect on those experiences, we find that those were the most life changing times for us. We endured them and came out of the darkness into the light that is always present to us in God. What happened to Jesus during those forty days? He was freed. Freed "from all devilish attempts to distract him from his true purpose, from hungry cravings for **things with no power to give him life, from any illusion** he might have that God would make his choices for him. After forty days in the wilderness, Jesus …learned to trust the Spirit that had led him there to lead him out again, with the kind of clarity **and grit he could not have found anywhere else."**[3]

Anyone who wants to follow Jesus all the way to the cross needs the kind of clarity and grit that is found only in the wilderness.[4] **We have entered the season of Lent once again**. The

[3] Taylor, Ibid
[4] Taylor, Ibid

word means spring time and it began Ash Wednesday and continues for forty days, not counting **Sundays, until Easter Sunday. It is a** time in which Christians are invited to place themselves into a wilderness experience by giving up things that hold our attention more than God or those things, which distract us from doing the will of God. But it is also a time in which we are called to take up spiritual practices, which help to foster God's kin-dom here on earth. It's not just a time of letting go, but it is also a time of taking up. As the Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor describes it, Lent is a time of greening the human soul **– pruned with repentance, fertilized with fasting, spritzed with self-appraisal, mulched with prayer.**

"As he submits to John's bath of repentance, Jesus shows the radical way he will confront the sin that enslaves humanity. Jesus' "baptism," begun in the Jordan and completed on **Golgotha, is repentance, self-denial, *metanoia* to** the fullest. John presents his baptism as a washing from sin, a turning from self to God."[5] Metanoia is about making a positive change in our lives and in our society not merely for the **sake of change, but with a deep understanding** of why the change is needed and how it will affect the lives of those around us and in our world.

What is asked of us is not that we spend the next forty days feeling guilty for being born human beings and for having human failings. God knows who and what God has created in us. **This is a time of choosing to live on** less in a land of plenty in a quest to live our lives and our faith more authentically.

Jesus sought to live his life more authentically as the chosen Son of God during his wilderness experience. He fasted **even though he could have easily made bread**. There was really no ominous sin in creating food for himself. Perhaps in doing so he could have addressed the problem of hunger in the world, but he did not. Jesus could have chosen the rulership of the **earthly kingdoms offered him by the devil** and delivered humanity from the oppression of the

[5] William Willimon. "Repent"; http://www.holytrinitynewrochelle.org/yourti95682.html

heinous rulers of all time. He did not. Jesus could have taken the leap of faith off the temple and established his power on earth as the Son of God yet he did not. You see in each temptation, Jesus was able to resist the easy way out and to realize that all that glitters is not gold because he knew the Word within the Word. "The **temptation, the ambiguities presented to Jesus, mean that** no [human being] can expect to be saved from the ambiguity of life in which we are led simultaneously by the Spirit and by the forces of evil."[6] It is in Jesus, the Word made flesh, that we as a people of faith are **to find our strength. It is in our faith and** following the life and teachings of Jesus that we are called to see not just the good, but also the best among the good.

As we look at ourselves as the people of Peace United Church of Christ, it is important that we claim God's story as our own. To own it we need to know it and we need to know how we can be **called the children of God. Lent is a time for** us to not only let go of the devils which plague us and separate us from the will of God for our lives, but it is a time of reclaiming our inheritance as children of God. We are called to journey these forty days in the wilderness with purpose just as Jesus did. Like Jesus, this is our time to free ourselves of envy, pride, the need to **always be in control, greed, hatred and divisions**. This is a time for us to be intentional in journeying with the Holy Spirit searching the character of our own lives and how we have made God a part of our daily lives, not just our Sunday life. This is a time for us to take in the Word within the Word. **It is a time for us to fast with the intent of being in service** to God and helping others around us. In order to do that we must take an appraisal of the clutter within our lives, the busyness, and the numbing things we do to not be aware of who we truly are or the **needs of others. This is a time for us to recommit** to our prayer lives. Praying not just for ourselves, but also for our church family. Each Sunday you hear the needs spoken in both words and in the silence during our Pastoral Prayer time. We are called to lift one another in prayer

[6] Craig B. Adams. "Preaching the Lesson – I- Luke 4:1-13" The Good Preacher.com

daily, not just on Sundays here. Look around you. What faces are missing from us today? Where are those people, those families that used to attend**? Let us pray that the members of our faith family** return to us. You can take the next step and actually pick up the phone and call those people and those families or send them a card. Invite them to join us here again as we journey forth in faith. **Let us pray that we continue to grow in faith as children of God.**

To grow in faith is to grow in our awareness of God's presence in our lives in each **second and each moment. God is present in each second** and every moment of our lives even when God seems far away to us, God is not.

Lent is a time of greening the human soul – **pruned with repentance, fertilized with fasting, spritzed with self-appraisal, mulched with prayer.** As you look at your own life, what numbing practices or devices are devils to you that you need to let go of? What offers you comfort and distracts you from the love and light of God? How is your prayer life? Are you just **talking to God or are you actually stopping to listen to what** God is saying in response to your prayer? God still speaks to us in the quiet stillness of our hearts, in the relationships we have with one another and with the world around us. **How are you living your life such tha**t it reflects you are a child of God? Our liturgical calendar gives us the gift of Lent, forty whole days for **finding out what life is like without the noise and busyness** we use to numb us to who we are called to be and to the world around us. It is a time for us to identify who we are and whose we are, claiming our inheritance as children of God. This spring time is a time for **strengthening and equipping ourselves while strengthening and equipping** the world around us in service to the One who created us. Amen