

WELCOME TO...
The Presbyterian Church of
Saint David
February 14, 2016



IN THE WILDERNESS

These times, they are troubling. This journey, it is hard... We follow our faithful Lord. It is God who sustains, not the temptations of this world... We follow our faithful Lord. In the Lord is our trust, our protection from harm... We follow our faithful Lord. Come, let us worship the One whom we serve... We follow our faithful Lord.

Gathering: *Because temptation is woven into the fabric of our lives, and we know the weariness of forty days in the desert, and the beckoning power of sweet fruit, and the vain promises of the world, we need you, God. We need you, God. Because we see the broken before the whole, and the half empty cup, and the unfinished task, and the thirst in freedom's quest, we need you, God. We need you, God.*

Hymn: Forty days and forty nights (vs. 1-3) **197**
Prayer of Confession *Almighty God, your Son fasted in the wilderness, and faced human temptations. Give us courage to face and name our own temptations, and to direct our lives in obedience to your Spirit. You know us better than we know ourselves; may we know you and grow closer to the vision you have for us, through Jesus Christ our Redeemer, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever; Amen.*

Silence is kept

Assurance of Pardon: *Brothers and sisters, be at peace. The Lord has heard your prayer, and has forgiven your sins.*

Hymn: Forty days and forty nights (vs. 4-5) **197**
Prayer of the Day: **Eternal God, the refuge and help of all your children, we praise you for all you have given us, for all you have done for us, for all that you are to us. In our weakness, you are strength, in our darkness, you are light, in our sorrow, you are comfort and peace. We cannot number your blessings, we cannot declare your love: For all your blessings we bless you. May we live as in your presence, and love the things that you love, and serve you in our daily lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord.** *written by St. Boniface (ca. 672-754)*

Scripture: 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.

There are no witnesses experiencing wilderness with Jesus, but Luke gives us a sense of the struggle that Jesus endures out there in the wilderness. Scholars are in remarkable agreement in their interpretation of this passage about Jesus facing an adversary who almost comes across as a "friend" who offers things that sound perfectly reasonable and good at first. (anyone seen the show Lucifer on TV?) After all, why shouldn't Jesus satisfy his hunger with a little bread, and wouldn't it be great if Jesus (instead of the hated Romans) ruled the world, and how impressive would it be if Jesus flung himself off the temple roof and a thousand angels came to rescue him? ... Scholars suggest that the tests come from deep within Jesus himself, hungry and alone and wondering: N.T. Wright suggests that "the devil's voice appears as a string of natural ideas in his own head. They are plausible, attractive, and make, as we would say, a lot of sense." This, Wright says, is a very "personal and intimate" struggle for Jesus; we remember that he was fully human as well as fully divine. And "the devil" not only offers attractive things but backs them up by quoting Scripture, which just shows how easily the Bible can be, and has been, used for entirely wrong purposes.

So, what's your wilderness experience like?

Lucifer, bored from his sulking life in hell comes and lives in Los Angeles only to help humanity with it's miseries through his experience and demonic abilities to bring people's deepest desires and thoughts out of them.

John Stendahl, evokes the wilderness – not only the wilderness in which Jesus was tested, but every wilderness in which we wander, at one time or another: "For the desert is not God-forsaken nor does it belong to the devil. It is God's home. The Holy Spirit is there, within us and beside us.

And if we cannot feel that spirit inside of us or at our side, perhaps we can at least imagine Jesus there, not too far away, with enough in him to sustain us, enough to make us brave" (New Proclamation Year C 2001). And so, let us set out on the journey of Lent, toward the cross, and remembering the empty tomb beyond.

Wilderness times are not to be conquered but endured, as we learn through the suffering and questioning and wandering, and are eventually able to discern God's ministering angels waiting on us, amidst the wild beasts of fear, self-pity, hunger, and loneliness. This wilderness within can ultimately set us free, for here we will most certainly encounter the Holy One. For the desert is not God-forsaken nor does it belong to the devil. It is God's home. There is no place in life devoid of God's grace – not even a cross. The Holy Spirit is there, within us and beside us. And if we cannot feel that Spirit inside us or at our side, perhaps we can at least imagine Jesus there, not too far way, with enough in him to sustain us, enough to give us courage and comfort and peace.

This ordeal of Jesus in the wilderness is in a way a repeat of the ordeal faced by Israel in the Exodus wilderness. The choice in both instances is whether or not to trust God to provide what is needed. ... whether or not to move through life under the rule of God's justice, mercy, and peace. ... or some other version. Though God's people failed, Jesus prevails.

Invitation: *Where is the glory now? All that light from last week all that wonder and mystery turns to dust and ashes. Where is the glory now? All that revelation on the mountain top turns to bread and wine and a table waiting for those willing to pick up the cross. Let us break bread together and begin this new journey.* Lord, let me hunger enough that I not forget the world's hunger. Lord, let me hunger enough that I may have bread to share. Lord, let me hunger enough that I may long for the Bread of Heaven. Lord, let me hunger enough that I may be filled.

Hymn: Let us break bread together

Prayer of Thanksgiving: *Rejoice in the Lord always. Shout out his name.*
For God is with us. Our God is with us. *The God of our salvation in whom alone we trust. Rejoice in the Lord always Shout out his name*
(we continue in prayer) *Pour out your Spirit upon the gifts of remembrance and the people who come from the four corners of life. Every time we eat the bread, we are strengthened to take the gifts from your garden of plenty, to share with all who hunger. Every time we take a sip of the wine of hope, our eyes are opened and we see the marginalized in the shadows and go out to gather them up and bring them to your table.*

Hymn: I come with Joy (4-5)

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Communion

Prayer following communion O God of communion and covenant, the cloud of your splendour and the fire of your love revealed your Son on the mountain heights. **Transform our lives in his image, write your law of love on our hearts, and make us prophets of your glory, that we may lead others into your presence. Amen.**

Hymn: Lord, dismiss us

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This is Lent, and into its wilderness God calls us. Come, brothers and sisters, Christ is heading for Jerusalem. And we must follow.