

**ST PAUL'S RONDEBOSCH
SERMON: (FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY)
21 FEBRUARY 2020
YEAR B**

**READINGS: GENESIS 9:8-17//PSALM 25:1-10//1 PETER 3:18-22//
MARK 1:9-15**

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**O God light of the minds that know you
Life of the souls that love you
And strength of the thoughts that seek you
Bless the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts
AMEN**

The Bible doesn't tell us anything about Jesus' life between the ages of 12 to 30 years. But now He came from His hometown Nazareth to begin His public ministry. This is the official beginning of His journey that would eventually take Him to the cross. Therefore this text marks the beginning of Lent Season Every year the first Sunday in Lent includes a reading of the temptation story.

But notice in Mark's Gospel we don't just get the temptation story. We also get the story of Jesus' baptism right before and his first sermon afterwards

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS IN THE WILDERNESS FOR US TODAY?

But before we look at the temptation of Jesus let us reflect on Jesus' Baptism

In Mark 1v 10-11 we read "*As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven 'You are my Son whom I love, with whom I am well please'*"

In Jesus' baptism, God revealed his true identity as God's Son, and the Holy Spirit descended on him, filling him and strengthening him empowering and anointing him to do God's work and overcome temptations

Just as Jesus received the Holy Spirit at his baptism, so we receive the Holy Spirit, at our Baptism. It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that we

can do God's work and withstand the tests and temptations that we experiences every day. God is present with us in his Spirit. By the Spirit, God stays with us.

Then Jesus hears the words of God, "***You are my son, whom I love with whom I am well please***" These are claiming words. These are words of affirmation. Words of acceptance. Words that tell Jesus who he is and to whom he belongs. It's like a parent wrapping their arms around their child and whispering in their ear, "I love you. You will always be my child. No matter what." They are words that enter into your body and wrap themselves around your heart. And that is the promise we heard at our baptism. God has already claim us. We belong to him. We are loved by him. When you feel down and worthless this morning. When you feel down or despondent or depressed. When you feel you are tempted and want to give up listen to God's voice "***You are my son/daughter, whom I love with whom I am well please***"

Let us now reflect on Jesus' temptation in the wilderness

In Mark 1 v 12 we read "***At once the Spirit sent him in the (desert) wilderness and he was in the wilderness (desert) forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals and the angels attended him***"

(Some translation say. That same Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness, to be tested,)

The same Spirit that descends upon Jesus at his baptism now drives him into the wilderness, to that place of challenge and struggle and purification and testing and temptation

Why did the Spirit drove Jesus to the wilderness? Did Jesus *need* to be in the wilderness for some reason?

*Maybe it is to strengthen Jesus for later on his journey to the cross. Remember when Jesus was in Gethsemane he prayed "**Father remove the cup of suffering. Then he surrendered, "Not my will, but yours be done. (Luke 22:44) and while hanging on the cross he said "My God My God why have thou forsaken me? (Matthew 27v46)***

He was tempted to give up // He was tempted not to trust in God anymore

What are some of the wilderness (desert) places you went to, recently (maybe the desert place of being diagnosed with COVID 19// CANCER of losing my job//of moving to another place// the desert place of losing a loved one).

that you were tempted to give up// not to trust God because nothing wants to come right in your life.

You will agree we do not volunteer to go to wilderness places. We don't look for opportunities to struggle. Which is probably why Mark reports that the Spirit *drove* (sent) Jesus to the wilderness. And the same is true with our periods of trial, temptation, and struggle. We don't choose these – they happen to us. Even when the challenges are of our own making – or caused by others but you agree – we don't go actively seek such hardship and problems.

But the question is can it be possible that the Spirit (God) might mould (refine) us during these challenges?

Don't get me wrong I am not saying that God causes us misery or suffering to teach us something or to punish us.

Notice that the Spirit doesn't tempt Jesus, but rather drives Jesus to the wilderness. Similarly, God don't wants us to suffer, or causes us to suffer. But maybe God is at work for us and through us during our wilderness (desert) times.

Maybe we can look at these wilderness (trials, problems struggles) times and ask, "Even though I did not wish for this, how God might be at work through this difficult period. How might God use me to help someone else?" These kinds of questions aren't meant so much to redeem struggle and suffering but rather to remind us of God's presence during those wilderness times that leave us feeling stretched beyond our abilities. Once again notice that the same Spirit of God that descended upon Jesus at his Baptism and drove Jesus out into the wilderness also accompanied him during that time and brought him back again.

In v13a we read **"And he was in the desert forty days being tempted by Satan"**

Why did Jesus have to spend 40 days in the wilderness?

As I said on Ash Wednesday the number 40 is very important in scripture. God caused it to rain for forty days and forty nights to cleanse the earth (Genesis 7:12). The Israelites were in the wilderness forty years. Moses spent forty days and nights on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:18; 34:28), and Elijah journeyed forty days and forty nights to Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:8). And now Jesus is tempted for 40 days

Forty is a number often associated with intense spiritual experiences

Forty is the number of weeks that it takes for a baby to be born. So maybe the number forty, used in scripture, may have something to do with being born, or reborn. It has to do with finding new life in the midst of your current life. One could say that the earth was reborn after the forty days of rain in Noah's story. For the Israelites, coming out of slavery and wandering in the wilderness for forty years was rebirth for their people. They were set free, to start a new life.

So what does this mean for us? Forty days in the wilderness (desert) for Jesus. Forty days of Lent for us. As we enter the Lenten season of forty days, perhaps you and I are invited to be reborn. To let the old ways of life that have become destructive and disorienting fall away and to be reborn to live life in a new way. To commit to a new way of being.

Many of you have noticed that the Rondebosch COMMON had burned and badly damaged. For weeks I just saw this black grass, bushes and vegetation. But on Friday as I walked around the COMMON –I noticed some green grass sprouting, ---New life/ new birth. Maybe it had to burn / it had to die //for this new green grass this new life to grow.

And maybe the only way for us to grow and to discover a new way of living, is that we have to die of our old habits: of greed, jealousy, prejudice, selfishness

CONCLUSION

What are the parts of your life God is wanting to be reborn? Where is God wanting you to live differently? Where is God wanting you to bring new life into your family, at your workplace into your community? You can only answer these questions through deep reflection and soul searching

Let this Lent be a different Lenten journey -- Let us use this 40 days to be our wilderness period for self- examination, reflecting on these questions so that the new you, the new me can emerge (be reborn).