

No sooner had Jesus been baptized in the Jordan by John the Baptist, with the Holy Spirit descending and Father announcing the Sonship of Jesus than the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, into the desert. Luke pauses between these two scenes to give us the genealogy of Jesus, but the text implies that as soon as Jesus rose from the waters of baptism, He turned away towards the emptiness, of the wilderness, the parched desert. Jesus, led by the Holy Spirit, turns away from the crowds of people, from John the Baptist and sets out into the loneliness of the wilderness.

Periodically God leads us into the desert. Sometimes we have to go back more than once. Pretty much anyone who became part of God's plan found themselves in the desert. Abraham and Sarah, Moses, David, Elijah, and even Jesus. No one is ever too excited about this time in the desert, it is a hard place, a severe place, partly because going into the desert means you have to leave the place you are at. Maybe that means leaving a place where you are comfortable, a place where you want to stay, a place where you are happy, a delightful place, or maybe it means you have to leave a place of misery but you had come to embrace the misery you know, and you trusted it. Either way, God does not settle for that, so we find ourselves on this difficult journey. When we find ourselves in the desert we really have no choice but to trust God, which is exactly why you're there. As we enter Lent for another year we find ourselves led into the desert, even when we do not want to go, having to trust in God, having to turn away from the incredible scene of the baptism, and turn towards the wilderness, trusting that the God who led you into this place will not leave you. Tonight, we enter our Lenten deserts examining the temptations of our Lord, and reflecting on our own temptations, all of our own doubts, all of our own sins.

After Jesus had been in the desert for forty days, eating nothing, the devil appears. The devil tempts Jesus, telling Him "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf

of bread". Jesus refuses, Jesus resists the temptation. Jesus tells the devil that humanity does not live by bread alone. But for the Author of Creation, His answer to the devil seems like someone who does not understand the needs of humanity. This stands in stark contrast with the God who sustained the Hebrews in the desert with mana. And the Christ who routinely fed thousands who gathered around Him in desert places. Whenever we enter the desert we go, in need of God to provide for our every need, we need God to sustain us physically, emotionally, spiritually. For someone who refuses citing that humanity does not live by bread alone, we find a God who is especially concerned with feeding a hungry humanity. Jesus commands us to feed the hungry, because in the starving and destitute we find Him who became starving and destitute. We find Jesus identifying with the suffering, those who are in desperate need, in a profound way. But we still find Him rejecting this temptation to turn the stones into bread. So why at this moment does Jesus reject this temptation?

Maybe the temptation for Christ, is not whether He will reject His humanity, His human needs, setting an example of extreme self-denial. Maybe the temptation is for the God who came to pour Himself out entirely to hold something back, maybe the temptation for Christ is to no longer come and identify with those who are hungry, those who are crying out, in desperate need, who cannot help themselves. Maybe the temptation for Jesus is not to give into His humanity, but to reject it. To no longer suffer the hunger, the pain, the loneliness of desert life. Maybe the temptation for us, is to also turn away from the hungry, the lonely, the tortured, the exiled, the suffering of the world.

In the second temptation, Jesus is led by the devil, and shown all the kingdoms of the earth. The devil tells Jesus that if He simply worships him, the devil will grant Him authority over all the kingdoms of the earth. Jesus again resists the temptation, telling the devil that only

the Lord our God is deserving of our worship and service. But what is the devil's temptation? We know that Jesus already has authority over the nations, indeed over all of Creation. He is already King of the Jews who reject Him, and of Pilate who condemns Him to death. Maybe the temptation of Christ was not whether He would resist authority which He already possessed, but whether we would be content with an unseen Kingdom. Whether we could remain faithful to the Kingdom of God, to serve in humility. Whether we could continue to worship in a world which continues to ask "if He is the Son of God then..."

In the final temptation, the devil takes Jesus to Jerusalem, to the pinnacle of the Temple, to the city in which He will die, atop the Temple where imperfect sacrifices are offered. And the devil says to Jesus, if You are the Son of God, throw Yourself off, the angels will not let You cast Your foot against a rock. Jesus refuses, Jesus refuses to avoid death, Jesus refuses to throw Himself off so the angels will catch Him. Jesus refuses to avoid the mission He came to complete, Jesus refuses the devil's final temptation, and Jesus led by the Holy Spirit continues along the same path, headed in the direction of our salvation. A path which will cost Christ more than simply striking His foot against a rock, but will cost Him His life. A path that will cause Him to undergo the suffering of humanity, feeling the weight of sins that are not His own. So that we may live within a Kingdom, where death is not the final authority, where sin and fear do not reign but where God's grace and love rule over all. A Kingdom free of desert wandering, where we all are able to worship and enjoy our God, without hunger and pain.

This Lent we enter our own desert, a desert of self-examination, in which we must rely solely on our God. We enter the desert turning away from wherever we are, allowing ourselves to be honest about what makes us unready to hear the Good News. We acknowledge our doubts, our temptations, our sins, our selfishness, and lay all of ourselves before the cross, resting our

hopes, only on the authority of Christ, in whose Kingdom we rest. We walk through this desert, ready to encounter the cross, so we might leave the desert embracing our salvation. We enter this somber season of Lent so that we can be ready to sing on Easter morning.