

SEEING IS HEALING --  
"Wandering Time of Wonder"

February 21, 2021; 9:00 am

Mark 1:9-15

Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO

Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

### **The Baptism of Jesus**

<sup>9</sup>In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup>And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. <sup>11</sup>And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

### **The Temptation of Jesus**

<sup>12</sup>And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. <sup>13</sup>He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

### **The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry**

<sup>14</sup>Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, <sup>15</sup>and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

### **I. A DIFFERENT TEMPTATION STORY**

How do you feel about temptation? As a general rule? Have you had any good temptations lately? Maybe to go out of the house without a mask, or something really radical?

Matthew asked if we could do a song BY the Temptations this week! We'll have to see if any of them are appropriate for church. Can't quite do the dancing part, but maybe we can work on some "spiritual choreography" for fun!

In my childhood church, we sang often of Temptation—capital T. It was definitely on our minds and something we were not supposed to "yield to"—though we weren't sure what yielding

was, either! (Maybe it was dancing. Come to think of it, it was a Baptist church....)

*Yield not to temptation,  
for yielding is sin;  
Each vict'ry will help you  
Some other to win;  
Fight manfully onward,  
Dark passions subdue;  
Look ever to Jesus,  
He'll carry you through.*

Now, my sister had a different version of that hymn, because she went to a certain kind of church camp called "Guild Girl Camp." Their version went like this: (and yes, she taught it to me and I still remember it to this day!)

*Yield not to temptation,  
for flirting is sin;  
Some Guild Girl will help you  
Her brother to win;  
Fight manfully onward,  
Dark passions subdue;  
Don't chase after the boys, girls,  
Let them chase after you!*

Okay, back to the message at hand. You're probably wondering, "Why are we talking about Temptation today, anyway?" In that passage Merilee read, it's barely mentioned. But it is in fact, tradition in the Church, on the First Sunday in Lent to explore with Jesus as he is tested in the Wilderness.

The writer of Mark barely mentions this "Temptation Moment" as a "blip on the screen", whereas Matthew and Luke go into much detail about Jesus' specific tests in the Wilderness and dialogue with the Adversary. This Satan figure is odd and shows up at odd times. Here, his assignment seems to be solely to "trip Jesus up" just as he's starting into his fledgling ministry and answering the Call on his life.

The mention is a funny little “Mark-an sandwich” where “**The Temptation of Jesus**” is thrown in there with just two verses, and includes some wild beasts along with the angels—right smack dab between the Baptism and the Recruitment of Disciples phase 1B of the Ministry Launch.

*12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.*

My hunch is that Mark did not see this as a major chapter in Jesus’ life, but was more concerned with what happened *after* the testing time in the Desert. More interested in getting on with Jesus’ non-stop ministry and mission.

The *next* question would be: Why did the creators of the Lectionary include this tiny telling of the Temptation story on this first Sunday in Lent, with a brief recap back a few weeks to the Baptism and Calling of the Disciples? Haven’t we already been there?

What if this is a “hand off?” Perhaps the gospel writers and the lectionary creators are saying, “Here you go. Now it’s *your* turn to tell the story. We’ve been there with Jesus in depth on this journey since Epiphany, and now it’s time for you, current day disciples, to delve-in, jump out of the nest and fly—on your own journey.

## **II. OUR STORY FROM THE WILDERNESS**

What is the Wilderness wandering for us? Here and now? If we were to be “driven by the Spirit” into a time of wandering and wondering, what would we encounter? Would we hang with wild beasts? If we did, would we do so unafraid, or shivering in our boots?! How would we need the angels to minister to us and tend to our fears and longings?

What would we be tempted by? What paths are we tempted to wander down, either aimlessly, or even purposefully, but perhaps not the right and faithful path for us?

Eric Elnes suggests that Temptation might be one of the Gifts of the spiritual journey. Yep! You heard that right! A gift? Really?! Yes, but not in the usual sense.

We’re not talking about those typical things we think of as temptations—too much sex, drugs and rock and roll, for instance, or other avarices of our day like greed, gluttony or envy.

“What I mean is the temptation to do GOOD,” he says. Yes, good and not evil. In itself, doing good is not the problem. Doing the WRONG good, however, is entirely the problem. By the wrong good I mean any good work that *is not yours to do*. It may be someone else’s good to do, but not your own.” (p. 105)

I love this concept Elnes lays out and having been playing with it in my mind and journal for a few weeks.

What does it mean to do the wrong good, even in the right way or at the right time? It means doing things in life that you can’t do *wholeheartedly!* Going down a path or staying in a path or a rut that you cannot give your whole heart and soul to.

That could be a job, a vocation, a role in the community, a hobby, a relationship or group—any number of things. If you are not living life wholeheartedly, you are not “swimming in *your* elemental waters.

So, how do we know what is the “right good” to say yes to and the wrong good thing to say no to? What to move toward, and what to steer away from?

Elnes says that’s where listening deeply and looking for the “sweet spot moments” with the guidance of the Holy Spirit come in. And, of course, being open to *all* the ways the Spirit guides us. We might think of this as an ongoing conversation: “between your body, soul, community of friends, loved ones, those you serve, and the Spirit to discern where [your path] lies

at any particular moment.” (Rev. Eric Elnes, *Gifts of the Dark Wood*)

So, as we engage the ongoing conversation, listen deeply, discern and look to the guidance all around, we watch for how we are tempted, and learn from the temptation not to take the wrong path toward something *good* but not for *us*.

Jesus’ temptations were very much the same. They were temptations to do good, not evil. Who wouldn’t want to feed the world? Run the zoo, according to God’s way; God’s wishes for the world? Launch an impressive ministry right off the bat, performing life-changing and life-saving miracles, so that people would be healed, and saved?! Would flock to him and his ministry would grow and thrive and he would be assured of God’s being pleased with him; that he was most definitely on the right path?

Jesus’ Temptation was to a good thing--saving the world. But, here in the Desert, with the Adversary breathing down his neck, he was tempted to do the right thing via the wrong path. We might be tempted that way too.

### **III. COVID RESET & REFLECT–DISSIPATED?**

Do you ever feel tempted to do everything? To save the world! Or at least feed the world. Say, by sundown?

We are tempted all the time! To get pulled in too many directions. Go down too many streams, so that our energies and flow of efforts are heading in too many sub-streams. I call this getting dissipated!

When Clarke and I first moved here to Buena Vista, I believe every volunteer board in town asked one of us to join! Humane Society, Mini-Blessings, Forum Series, Carriage Club, Heritage, Chamber, to name just a few!

I told Judy Hassell about this and she said, “Yup! That’ll happen to you! If you let it.” I told Clarke, “We gotta not get dissipated!”

He said, “What do you mean by that 10-dollar word?! I shared the image of a mighty river that rolls along and then a whole bunch of little streams branch off and take the flow down to very little. The mighty river is no longer mighty, but flowing and weak with its energies in little rivulets.

Many people are realizing in this pandemic time that they have felt dissipated for much of their lives. Too much. Overly busy, over-committed, over-functioning. “I don’t have to have a meeting every night of the week!” Be gone from my family or spouse—out being busy. Involved. Running every which way!”

I have heard this chorus from the lips of so many friends and neighbors! More times than I can count.

This is an Epiphany! And it’s an important “aha moment” to pay attention to! Especially right now, as we are tired of being cooped up and isolated, tired of puzzles and endless movies from the library and take-out meals and Zoom everything. We have a glimmer of hope as vaccines are happening and Spring is tempting us around the corner, and we might just be able (it’s tempting!) to resume kind of normal life!

Will we forget all that awakening we had to the craziness of the busyness, and just return to “life as normal” pre-COVID? Or, will we practice the pause and stop a moment and ask ourselves:

Were we doing all those time and energy-consuming things before, because we found meaning and purpose in them, and they served others in vital, life-giving ways? Or, because we felt some sort of demonic spirit or demanding force *driving* us?

Like the Adversary in the Desert—driving Jesus along, taunting him, looking over Jesus’ shoulder, and egging him on to do far more than is humanly possible. Urging from a place of guilt and inadequacy, scarcity, instead of God’s love and affirmation in abundance?

Like Jesus, we can be tempted to live, move and have our being in a state or spirit of anything but *enough*. (Teaser—worship with us in March, as we explore “enoughness” alongside Jesus on the Journey, as these temptations to believe we are inadequate never seem to leave us alone!

You are enough. Just as you are.

You might be tempted to do and be too much—be all things to all people. But that is not the Spirit whispering in our ear, that whisper of doubt comes from the Adversary, not our Loving Creator.

#### **IV. CONGREGATIONAL TEMPTATIONS**

As a Congregation in community, we can also be tempted to try to be all things to all people. As long as I’ve been in ministry, 30 years now! I have heard that refrain so many times and places: “Why doesn’t our church do \_\_\_\_\_such and so?”

David Lose suggests that when we are tempted to “get dissipated”—either as ourselves in our own lives, or as congregations in community, we look back to Jesus’ ministry.

It might seem like Jesus was always running around, on the go, swarmed by people needing him, and having a hard time keeping a balance, taking a Sabbath rest, not being pulled in too many directions.

But Jesus did resist the temptation to “be all things to all people” if you look closely. He did meet with his disciples and hone-in on a focused stream for their ministry, even after the Adversary tempted him to “save the world” on a regular basis!

Jesus’ ministry was simply: “proclaiming the good news of God’s coming kingdom, healing the sick, and resisting the forces of evil by casting out harmful spirits.”

That’s a rather focused Mission Statement, if you boil it down.

**Proclaim, heal, resist.** Could it be useful for us as we ponder our own sense of mission and purpose? We try to nail down some words of description, but as soon as we do, we feel limited by them; and then we’re back to being tempted to “be all things to all people!” It can be a vicious circle!

Maybe we narrow down the **concepts**, even the words on the page, but then freely flesh it out and let it flow as we live into it! Start with Jesus’ mission statement as a *springboard* and then launch with abandon into the living out of our lives and purpose, and being in community and loving service together.

**Proclaim. Heal. Resist.** No more than that. No less. A helpful framework to start with. In our individual lives and communal both.

I drafted a “personal framework statement” for myself, in light of this. For using whenever I am tempted to get dissipated, pulled down too many paths, urged to do the “wrong, right thing.”

I love anagrams, acrostics, word plays—if you haven’t figured that out! So, I’ve already found more words than Proclaim, Heal, Resist—but this is what “fleshing it out” means for me on my faith Journey. I wonder if you might like to try this for yourself—as we begin this Lenten Season.

WHERE – It’s an acrostic. Where am I going on this wandering and wondering journey? I will ask myself every day if I am staying in line with WHERE God would have me focus.

*Words, Healing Energies, Resist, Engage*

1. **Words** – are they encouraging words? Spreading the Good News of God’s love for *all*? Building up the body—the community? Are they words that speak love, encouragement and affirmation, as they come out of my mouth?

2. **Healing Energies** – Am I loving God, my neighbor and myself with my energies? How do I focus on healing for all—home, neighborhood, earth?

3. **Resist** – Am I answering the call to stand up and stand out—against forces and movements that harm my fellow humans? To watch for spirits and actions that damage, and refuse to sit silently by?

Demons—evil energies in our world—*can* be resisted—in Jesus’ name and with God’s help. Swept out of our collective house, like Jesus chased them out of the Temple—not swept under the rug and allowed to fester and wreak havoc on our brothers and sisters.

4. **Engage**—the world and the Holy, by an active and ever-present prayer life. Not to escape the world and dealing with others, but to be more fully present.

David Lose reminds us, beyond the active mission and ministry, that: “Jesus also prays. He actually takes time to pray, to withdraw and tend to his own spiritual life. [This is] way, way too easy to forget; for all of us!”

This is not something to “add to your “to do” list—“make time to pray!”—but rather that to remind us that breathing, resting, renewing, connecting are *good* things, however we may do that.”

## **V. KNOW YOUR LIMITS**

When we are tempted to do too many good things, it’s good to look to Jesus. To see how he managed all that temptation, but also knew his limits and knew to “take it to the Lord in Prayer. If you remember last week’s story of the Transfiguration, after Jesus was all shining up on the mountain, he went back down to the valley to “get back to it,”

<sup>32</sup> That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. <sup>33</sup> And the whole city was gathered

around the door. <sup>34</sup> And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

But note something here. Mark says that “they brought *all* who were sick” and that Jesus “cured *many* who were sick.”

David Lose muses on this: “I don’t know if this contrast is intentional, but it strikes me that even Jesus didn’t seem to cure them all. Which may be instructive.

We so often can focus on who we’ve missed, what we’re not doing, where we’ve fallen short, when it might help tremendously instead to focus on, and draw strength from, who we’ve reached, what we’ve accomplished, and where we have moved more fully into the calling we’ve received from God.”

## **VI. WANDERING TIME OF WONDER**

So then, how shall we wander, in this time of Wilderness, on the Lenten Journey? Where is wonder called for, when we discover new paths and potential ways forward? How can we wonder about all we are seeing with new eyes about one another and our world, without wandering down too many tiring pathways?

Can we wonder as we wander? See the “wilderness exploring experience” as a Gift?

Know that we are not driven there by the Spirit and then abandoned—ever? But guided, companioned, loved, led, always –by God, wild beasts and angels alike—as we write our story, our good news gospel?

Let us wonder as we wander, following in the Way of Jesus. Leaning on the everlasting arms, and learning how to say YES! to the right thing and not to the wrong thing—for us. In this season, on this journey. Amen.