

12 At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, 13 and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him. 14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

A place to call home

Camping is an odd American pastime. We have beautiful homes, houses, with heating/cooling, running water, plumbing and electricity but we still choose to go camping. We spend hundreds if not thousands of dollars to live like we're homeless. We buy little houses called tents just so we can spend time away from home. We buy a second smaller set of everything that goes in the tent such as sleeping bags, mattresses, lanterns, chairs, and even a stove to cook our food, just so we can get back out into the wild and reconnect with our nature.

Lest we think Jesus spent over a month on vacation reconnecting with nature, we should probably remember that camping wasn't really a thing until about 100 years ago and even then it was something of an oddity. The only time people “camped” was when they went to war or migrated from one location to the next and then it wasn't camping, that was life. Jesus actually went out into the wild. Not a rustic campsite but a hostile environment where life was a struggle. This was no vacation.

Neither is the life of a Christian. It's not easy and to assume that the struggle is over and there is no need to strive for survival as soon as one becomes Christian ignores the very real dangers that live in this world. That's life in the wild. We don't know where life leads but we don't need to be afraid because we have a savior who stepped into the wild, we have a Savior who takes us to a place we can call home.

Every year, the first Sunday in Lent we look at Jesus' temptation. This year we are reading through the gospel of Mark - who is not known for being a man of many words. Mark happens to give us the shortest description of Jesus' temptation, just two verses stating it happened. I assume that everyone that Mark wrote to was well aware of what Jesus went through when he was tempted so Mark doesn't spill any ink on the details. What matters to Mark is how and when Jesus was tempted.

First the when because Mark ties Jesus' temptation to Jesus' baptism. While Jesus is still sopping wet, dripping with water - he is immediately (Mark's favorite word) driven into the wilderness. There was no break. It was straight to work. Literally thrown by the Holy Spirit out to be tempted or tested by the devil. Maybe he had some questions, maybe he was trying to discover the true nature of this one proclaimed to be God's Son but either way this is the wilderness. The last place anyone would want to go - especially if they love camping. This is where the wild animals reside. A

place known as cursed in the Psalms. A desolate and deserted land where the demons were known to reside. This is the devil's turf, his kingdom that Jesus enters.

This is also very similar to Israel's entrance into the wilderness. Just as Israel passed through the waters of the Red Sea and encountered tests in the wilderness - so also would Jesus. For Israel the wilderness is marked by the disobedience as they failed, fell into temptation, rebelled against God and suffered his wrath causing an entire generation to perish. Here Jesus identifies with the people of God who are tested in the wilderness and he was tempted.

When we go into the wild, we're not exactly roughing it. We're often glamping (glamorous camping). When we're tempted how often has it been after 40 days without food? How often do we go unprepared or even fast for more than a few hours? It doesn't take us much to fall into sin. I get grouchy when I miss a meal. And then to be tempted makes me realize that I daily sin much. Even after baptism.

At our baptism we are delivered from death and brought into the kingdom of God. But that doesn't mean the problems will disappear. Rather, it brings us under attack. It makes us a target. Previously the devil wasn't so concerned with us. We were on his side but now we are often dragged kicking and screaming into the wilderness, a sinful world, where we don't want to go. We'd rather God make life comfortable for us. We don't want the struggle. We don't want to suffer. We'd rather go glamping than find ourselves in the wilderness.

But the temptation is always there to think, "I could do the same thing Jesus did." It's the lie that creeps in continuously, "It's up to you. Jesus did it, so you can too." The devil's minions want us to focus on ourselves and see the times when you either, avoid temptation and pat yourself on the back and become a Pharisee, or give into temptation fall into despair.

But it's foolish to think we would ever face something like Jesus. How often are we tempted by the devil? He's a finite being, capable of being in one location, one place at a time. The majority of the time we are tempted by our own sinful nature that resides within each one of us. James writes, "*each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed*" (James 1:14). Like Israel we fail frequently, fall into temptation, rebel against God and yet Jesus still comes into the wilderness for us.

"We have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet he did not sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus wasn't out glamping. He was roughing it. Struggling. Suffering. Being tempted. This is not a how to guide. He doesn't demonstrate how we are to combat temptation. Mark only records the facts of what Jesus did. While Mark records few words in two verses - the results of his time in the wilderness the kingdom of God is near. You have a place to call home.

That doesn't mean that the devil's a happy camper. It means he's homeless. His kingdom is coming to a close. He's been served notice, evicted from his house, now he spends his time in a van down by the river trying to convince others that the wilderness is so much more fun. It is at this temptation of Jesus that Satan realized that he cannot win. His time is short. He's bound by God's Word and if he can't hurt the head then he'll do as much damage as he can to the body of Christ.

Upon recognizing his defeat he turns his attention to God's people. Mark jumps from Jesus' baptism, to his temptation, to John's imprisonment, and Jesus' proclamation, "The Kingdom of God has come!" That didn't mean life would be so much more comfortable for Jesus' followers. John is imprisoned even when the Kingdom is so close he can feel it. Jesus begins to preach the good news of God, the coming of his kingdom. Not a tent in the wilderness, a cardboard box under an overpass but a kingdom, a home. This is far from a temporal camping trip but a home you don't want to leave. A Kingdom that is near because Jesus is the one bringing it..

Some even argue we see a glimpse of the Kingdom of God in the wild. There are two ways of reading, "*He was with the wild animals, and the angels attended him.*" Those words can either be read as Jesus brings restoration and perfect peace even among the animals - the way God intended this world to be. As Isaiah speaks, "*the infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest*" (Isaiah 11:8). Or provision. That even in the wilderness God cared for his son, and he still cares for his people even when they are imprisoned.

Even when the world appears to be falling apart. God still provides and restores because of what Jesus accomplished. The devil tried again. He wanted 2 out of three. The second time however wasn't in the wilderness but a garden. The odds were stacked against Jesus. Instead of angels, his disciples kept watch and prayed. They let him down, fell asleep, tempted him to take another way out, and even fled from him. But Jesus didn't give up. He took their failures to the cross. He suffered hell in our place. He rose from the dead and is now preparing a permanent home for us even as he sends us out into the wilderness to find the lost.

When he finds us he provides food, clothing, shelter, and even a perfect life free from falling into temptation. Christ saves us, not as example, but as our perfect substitute. He also forgives and empowers us to struggle against sin.

That's where Lent begins, right here with us in the wilderness. The worst parts of life, in a broken world, full of cancer, pain, and death. And we start here with the hurt and struggle so that when we arrive at Good Friday - we realize that Jesus has already been there too. He's been to hell and back through death which means he knows the way. He will lead us through the wild.

The Kingdom of God has come! Repent and believe the gospel. Find comfort no matter what your situation or station in life. Even if you don't like camping. It is funny to think that we have fancy homes and yet choose to spend time in a tent. It's funny how much I enjoy camping. But there

isn't anything quite like going home after a month of backpacking and hiking. After a week or month on the trail, away from home, tired, hungry, aching... often our struggle helps us appreciate what we already have. How much more the struggles in this world? Knowing that God has taken care of everything. He sent his Son to evict the devil and make friends out of his enemies, bring life from our death, and give us a place we can call home with him. Amen.