

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

The Spirit Chooses

Epistle Lesson

1 Corinthians 12:1-11 (NRSV)

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ²You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. ³Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

Gospel Lesson

Luke 4:1-13 (NRSV)

¹Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where 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. ³The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." ⁴Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

⁵Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And 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. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸Jesus answered him, "It is written,

'Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.'"

⁹Then 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, ¹⁰for it is written,

'He will command his angels concerning you,
to protect you,'

¹¹and

'On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

¹²Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ¹³When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Bible/Sermon Focus

This week Pastor Andy used the term and idea of “delayed gratification” for the time between Jesus’ baptism when he received his calling, and the implementation of that calling. In Luke’s Gospel, after Jesus is baptized we are presented with a genealogy. Unlike the genealogy in Matthew that we spent time with in Advent, there are no women named in Luke’s genealogy. Whereas Matthew’s genealogy traces Jesus back to Abraham, Luke’s genealogy traces Jesus all the way back to Adam. This feels like such an odd placement of a genealogy. Mary’s pregnancy and birth had already been recorded. There are even two stories of Jesus as a child in Luke’s gospel before we reach Jesus’ baptism.

Right when Jesus’ calling is confirmed, and his ministry is about to begin, everything stops in our story, and then something happens. Jesus finds himself tested and tempted by the devil.

I have often heard church folk talk about how right when you are really getting going on your path, that’s when the devil will try to trick you. I have seen ordinands (future clergy) getting sick right before their final interviews with the Board of Ordained ministry. I have watched a person choose to get sober, and win a free night of drinking 10 minutes later. I have seen ministry leaders on the verge of cutting edge, life changing ministry, and all of the sudden the technology they are using breaks. As Rev. Dr. Thomas Bohache writes, “As soon as [Jesus] had acknowledged God’s love for him and been called God’s Beloved Child, he was subjected to forces that would tear him away from that love.”

When these things happen, some church folk say that it’s the devil, or evil that’s trying to stop God’s good plan from happening. Personally, I always felt like it was more like labor pains; the push into something new is beautiful, sure ... *and* it breaks you. But new life indeed comes. Or it’s like entering into a warm jet stream. Entering into the main push means crossing through hard waters to get there.

But you will get there.

There are seasons where our calling feels stagnant or uncertain. There are parts of our path that are bumpy and painful. “It is remarkable to think that in the story of his call to ministry, even Jesus had to sit in the uneasiness, listen and wait.”

Because the life that God promises us is not a half life filled with a half love. Our calling is one that will change the world for the better. As Pastor Andy said this week, “We might be tempted to just take the stones around us and consider them to be bread, and say, ‘It’s good enough. These will do.’ But, the thing is, we know there is a ‘heavenly banquet table’ set and waiting for us and for all of God’s children. If we can only wait.”

Discussion Questions

1. When have you felt pulled into the wilderness, tested, and tempted?
2. Where do you find your strength and your patience when you are feeling tested?
3. Reflect on this quote from Pastor Andy, “If it feels like the Spirit is leading us into the wilderness, it’s because She is. But we follow wherever the Spirit leads, even if it is into the wilderness.”

4. When have you accepted "stones for bread?"
5. What are your spiritual gifts? How do they fit into the community of Manchester UMC?

Prayer

Nurturing God, you invite us to sit at your table and on the way we find temptations instead of sustenance. Help us to seek you in our ministry. Remind us that the labor pains bring new life and new work. Renew us when we are famished. Clarify our calling. Help us to hold each other through the storms. Amen.

"As soon as he had acknowledged God's love for him and been called God's Beloved Child, he was subjected to forces that would tear him away from that love." - Thomas Bohache