

**Reflection | January 15, 2023**

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**Matthew 4:1-17 | Temptation of Jesus**

The Temptation of Jesus is one of my favorite stories. It captures important pieces from the Hebrew Bible to showcase how those stories continue to be formative through the life of Jesus and our own. We hear the voice of Evil tempting Jesus with its whispers, just like the whispers we hear from the world around us that try to pull us away from God's presence. At the core of this reading from the Gospel of Matthew is this constant reminder of how fragile our relationships are with ourselves, our neighbors, and, eventually, with God.

The story of Jesus in the wilderness for forty days and nights can be likened to Moses traveling up the mountain, eating nothing but the words spoken by God. While Moses is in the presence of God, the people at the bottom of the hill become impatient and fearful. Although life in Egypt was hard, they had shelter and food. Now, Moses has leading them all over the desert to a Promised Land that seemed too far away. They felt abandoned and alone. So to fill the emptiness in their body, mind, and soul, they began to worship tangible things other than God.

We, too, become impatient and fearful when our prayers seem to go unanswered. We wonder where is God's justice when bad things happen to good people and bad people seem to get away unharmed. We start to imagine that the destruction of the earth is imminent. And, it's so easy to hide our thoughts and fears behind computers and phone screens. It becomes easier to leave faith behind and join the rest of humanity who has given in to the idols of social media influencers, celebrated actors and musicians, and politicians who say the right things even if they don't act in the same way.

Jesus walks into the unknown of the wilderness, which is not a place, but a state of mind. He meditates on the stories of his ancestors and what he knows of the world around him. He becomes aware of the effects of evil with promises of beauty and power. Evil will follow is everywhere in order to win our body, mind, and soul.

Leaning on the words from the Ten Commandments, Jesus knew that following anything other than God's will for humankind would lead to despair. He was reminded of the Love of God, the Mercy of God, the Grace of God, and the Compassion of God that comes with no conditions attached. God is there for us whenever and wherever we are.

God is patient. God is kind. God is a long-term investment that yields much more than what we put in. Evil is shallow. Evil is self-serving. Evil is an instant gratification that will only leave us wanting more to fill the emptiness in our hearts.

Jesus rebukes Evil with every try, leaving Evil empty-handed. God sends angels to Jesus to replenish his body, mind, and soul. This is the moment Jesus begins his ministry of Godly Love and Compassion that is given to all. We, like Jesus, will never be empty again.

Let us pray,

When we feel the world around us leaving us behind, remind us, O God, of your love and mercy. When we feel that our lives are in shambles and that nothing is good, nudge us toward your grace and compassion. Help us to be patient with ourselves and others as we find our footing in the bumpy landscape of the wilderness before us. Help us walk with love, grace, mercy, and compassion in our hearts so that we may help others find their way to the path of your infinite Love.

With Jesus as our Wilderness Guide, we pray. Amen.