Good morning, Family. Today is the first Sunday of Lent. Let me briefly explain to remind us of the significance of the season. Lent serves as a time of consecrated and increased awareness of the suffering and victory of Christ. It is a season of self-reflection, self-denial, repentance from sin, fasting, almsgiving and charity, and confession of sin. It provides a fresh look at the available intimacy of our Heavenly Father and of the price He paid for our sin. It should not be viewed as legalistic or compulsory but as an opportunity for renewal and spiritual cleansing. Lent is a time dedicated to the intentional nurturing of our souls and the relationship we have with Jesus.

In our Gospel reading this morning, Jesus has been baptized and led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted. God uses wilderness experiences for His Glory and our good. So, let me say this here: The mission of temptation—of the tempter--is not simply to make you feel bad or make you experience regret. John 10:10 tells us, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.” The mission of Satan has not changed. As futile as Satan’s attempt was to destroy the mission of Christ, that was Satan’s goal. What we learn from the Gospel passage on Christ’s temptation is that before believers surrender to temptation and reaps destruction, Satan will seduce us with the counterfeit promise of satisfaction. Family, it is the will of god for us to find our total satisfaction in Him. In His abundant grace, our God always provides deliverance. Paul affirms this wonderful truth in 1 Corinthians 10:13:

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

This is crucial scripture for us. Temptation is a common experience for the Christian. I may change its shape as we grow, but it never completely goes away. Often, God awakens us in a wilderness. We come to live by the Word of God because in the isolation and barrenness we learn better to rely on Him. But god has promised us and has given us what we need to resist temptation successfully, we do so to His glory. Jesus shows us by example in His wilderness experience. Matthew 4:1-11:

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

4 Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 6 “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:

“‘He will command his angels concerning you,

and they will lift you up in their hands,

so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”

7 Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

10 Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’”

11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Church, the wilderness is not the place to prepare for the wilderness. Our capacity to repent and to resist temptation comes from our relationship with God and the grace of His deliverance. It doesn’t come from our own strength or willpower:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven,[a] Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. 16 Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Hebrews 4:14-16

Our ability to repent and to resist temptation is about God’s grace, and it is *for* God’s glory. It should reflect our utter dependence upon Him. As Paul writes in Philippians 3:10-12,

10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Listen, Family. Not all of our wildernesses are entered willingly or by choice. An Illness, a loss, a setback of any personal nature can bring on an unwelcomed season in the wilderness. We all go through them—seasons of spiritual dryness or even, at times, our own spiritual apathy. But all wilderness experiences offer within them an invitation to deeper faith. God is with us, ministering to us, patiently awaiting our turn to Him—every single time. Psalm 23 teaches us that. A wilderness experience can open our eyes to the presence, the power, and the work of God in our own lives. For His glory, Jesus combatted and destroyed every lie of the Enemy—Satan—with the truth of God’s Word.

Some of you may be in the wilderness this morning. Your soul may be weary. You are tired, frustrated, disparaged. Can I encourage you today to tell God about it? Be honest, bearing your soul before the Lord. Then respond as Joel 2:12 instructs us: “And yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart.” To know Christ and the power of His Resurrection, remembering that God is above and greater than all our circumstances can help us find rest in Him. Habakkuk 3:17-19 encourages this baring of the soul, despite seemingly hopeless circumstances:

7 Though the fig tree does not bud

and there are no grapes on the vines,

though the olive crop fails

and the fields produce no food,

though there are no sheep in the pen

and no cattle in the stalls,

18 yet I will rejoice in the Lord,

I will be joyful in God my Savior.

19 The Sovereign Lord is my strength;

he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,

he enables me to tread on the heights.

Christ never sinned. He came to bear our sins: “God made Him who had no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God” ( 2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus was committed to you then, all the way to the cross and beyond. He remains committed to you now--in your wilderness valleys and on your mountain-top victories. Christian, you and I are on a mission. Perhaps, it’s time to repent of spiritual apathy (mediocrity), to repent of seeking satisfaction in places other than Christ Himself. What has distracted you from cultivating your relationship with great intention? Allow this season of Lent to be a time of reflection and preparation *for His glory*! The Psalmist writes in 130:6, “I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His Word, I hope. My soul waits in hope for the Lord.” Family, God is able to do what He has promised! Christ is committed to you. How’s your commitment? Let the Lenten season be a time to re-energize your relationship with Him!