

SERMON FOR SUNDAY FEBRUARY 22 2026

Lent 1 – Matthew 4:1-11 – Jesus in the Wilderness

I have to tell you, “I love the wilderness.”

I find peace in the wilderness. The forest. The quiet. The birds. The water. Paddling on the water. Fishing. Sitting around the fire. No technology. This type of wilderness is my sacred space.

Today we hear the story of Jesus in the wilderness. I want you to remember that just prior to Jesus being led into the wilderness Jesus was with John the Baptist and he was baptized. The heavens opened up and a voice said, “This is my Son the Beloved with whom I am well pleased.” After the baptism Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness where he fasted for forty days and forty nights. After forty days and nights Jesus was famished and the tempter appeared. So Jesus is baptized. He is tempted. He serves.

Jesus’ ministry begins after his baptism. Our baptism is also the place where our new life begins. It is important to remember that in baptism God claims us as his children. This is important to remember. David Lose suggests, “you only know who you are when you know whose you are.”

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When push comes to shove, all the various temptations we may encounter stem from the primary temptation to forget whose we are and therefore to forget who we. Because once you don’t remember who you and whose you are, you’ll do all kinds of things to dispel the insecurity that attends any human life and to find that sense of security and acceptance that is essential to being happy.

That, I believe, is Adam and Eve’s problem in the Genesis story. When the serpent comes, he doesn’t start out with a temptation but instead sows mistrust in Adam and Eve – and let’s remember that this one isn’t on Eve; Adam is there all the time and just can’t seem to find anything to say. In particular, the serpent tries to undermine the relationship of trust between God and God’s children. “Did God really say,” the serpent asks, misrepresenting and undermining God’s instructions. “You will not die,” the serpent asserts, suggesting that there are things God knows but isn’t telling. Only when this primary relationship has been undermined are they susceptible to the temptation to forge their identity on their own, independent of their relationship with God, and then take and eat the forbidden fruit.

Jesus' encounter with the devil is, by contrast, nearly the opposite. The devil also tries to undermine Jesus' relationship with God by suggesting it is not secure, that he should test it by throwing himself off the mountain, or that he should go his own way by creating food for himself, or that he should seek the protection and patronage of the devil rather than trust God's provision. Yet at each point Jesus resists, not simply by quoting Scripture in general but by quoting Scripture that reminds him of God's trustworthiness, the need to depend on God for all good things, and consequently of God's promise to care for him and all God's children.

Adam and Eve, victims as much to original insecurity as they are original sin, forget whose they are and so lose themselves in the temptation to secure their identity on their own. Jesus falls back on his relationship with God, reminding himself whose he is and so remembering who he is, a dependent, but beloved, child of God – dependent on the providence, care, and protection, of the God who has promised to do anything to care for him and all of us.

There are so many temptations in this world, most of them coming not as apples hanging from a tree but rather subtle messages that seek to undermine our identity and invite us to forget whose we are. So many commercials suggest we are inadequate. So many headlines suggest that there is not enough to go around.

In contrast though, we have an opportunity to root ourselves in the same baptismal promise that safe-guarded and empowered Jesus. Our baptismal promise that reminds us that God says we are so totally enough, that there is plenty to go around, and that we need not live in fear.

Our identity comes from the people with whom we hang out and is always received, rather than created. It comes, that is, always as a gift and a promise.

And that's why it's so important that you know who you are when you realize whose you are. You are, part of God's family, part of the people of Zion. May your calling, your vocation, lead you to great things during your wilderness journey. Know that there is hope as we go through Lent for we know what awaits: the Resurrection of our Lord. Amen.