

Daily Discipleship

First Sunday in Lent (A) – Matthew 4:1-11

Discipleship: *An Instrument of Peace and Love*

Focus Question: *This week how might you be an instrument of God's peace and love?*

word of life

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.” Matthew 4:1-2 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 4:1-11

The description of the temptation of Jesus begins with God's Spirit leading Jesus from the baptismal waters of the Jordan River to a time of testing by the devil. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all mention the Spirit's role in leading Jesus into the wilderness. (The Gospel of John does not include a description of the temptation.) The Spirit does not protect or hide Jesus from a confrontation with the devil, but nor does the Spirit abandon him.

1. *How do you understand the role of God's Spirit during the temptation?*
2. *How can this time in the wilderness be a gift for Jesus?*

During his time in the wilderness, Jesus practices the spiritual discipline of fasting – abstaining from eating food. Some fasts last only from sunrise to sunset, but in Matthew's Gospel the fast of Jesus is described as lasting day and night. Thus, by the end of the fast, Jesus is famished.

3. *Imagine what it feels like to be famished. Describe.*
4. *How easy is it for dieters to resist the temptations of sweets when they are famished?*
5. *How clearly do you think when you are hungry?*

It is the devil who comes to tempt Jesus with basic human desires: food, power, and prestige. Jesus is confronted with the limits of his own humanness. When his hunger, loneliness, and human weakness might be overwhelming, Jesus returns to God's Word again and again. “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4 NRSV)

6. *How does someone not live by bread alone?*
7. *Describe someone who lives by the word from God's mouth.*

The second test appears to be a test of Jesus, but in actuality it is a test of God. Jump off a cliff and see if God catches you. Does God really care? If so, let God prove it. But Jesus counters, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” (Matthew 4:7 NRSV)

8. *What are other ways people test God?*
9. *Why are we not to test God?*

The third test is about worship. There are so many possibilities of things, people, and places to worship. It seems strange for the devil to offer Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if Jesus worships him. What right does the devil have to give it away? Again, Jesus counters with scripture: “Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.” (Matthew 4:10 NRSV)

10. *Which temptation would have been the most difficult for you to resist?*
11. *How does the devil tempt you on a daily basis?*

The Spirit leads Jesus to the wilderness for a time of temptation. During those forty days, God shapes Jesus into an instrument of God, focused on God's Word and filled with the Spirit. In like fashion, it is the Spirit which leads people into the forty days of Lent. Hopefully, as disciples of Christ, we are willing to be shaped by God to become God's instruments of peace and love.

word among us

Lent is a time to re-order our lives, to examine priorities, and to be open to God shaping our lives. It can be a time to “live in the wilderness” as we are challenged and renewed. The church has many examples of people who were challenged to re-order their lives. One such example is St. Francis of Assisi. During Lent, *Daily Discipleship* will be exploring the life of St. Francis with particular emphasis on the peace prayer attributed to him, “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.”

St Francis was born in 1181 or 1182 in Assisi, Italy to a wealthy family and died October 3, 1226. He grew up in the comforts of life and pursued a military career until he became ill. While St. Francis was recovering, he began to experience a conversion process steeped in prayer. For him, it was a wilderness time of struggle and discernment. He discovered God’s call to leave the comforts of his life and commit his whole being to rebuilding the church. Like Jesus, his life was shaped by God’s Word, particularly Matthew 10:7-13. This passage served as a foundation for his life choices of poverty, love, and service to Jesus Christ.

1. *Take a moment to read Matthew 10:7-13. What is its message?*
2. *What does it mean to be “converted”?*
3. *Describe when you have been converted or re-directed by God’s Word.*

St. Francis understood his mission to rebuild the church, and so he literally began re-build church building structures. Over time, he clarified his calling from God to rebuild the spiritual life of the church. In 1210, St. Francis and some of his followers obtained permission of Pope Innocent III to begin the Order of Franciscan Friars.

4. *What else do you know about St. Francis?*
5. *How is he usually depicted in art, statues, or literature?*

God’s Spirit led Jesus to the wilderness for forty days of fasting and testing. From there, Jesus was launched into his ministry. St. Francis struggled with his own sense of call before being launched into a lifetime of service.

6. *How are you setting time aside to listen to God’s call to you?*
7. *What might be the danger and or blessing of spending time in the wilderness discerning God’s will?*

The forty days of Lent can be a wonderful gift for those seeking spiritual growth. You are encouraged to take your calendar and set aside time during Lent for prayer, worship, study, and service. Some disciples of Jesus set aside Lent by fasting from certain kinds of food. Others give up playing video games or watching television. A few commit to giving up gossiping, negative thinking, whining, or other vices.

8. *Take time to identify those activities or vices which draw you from a close relationship with Jesus Christ. How might you fast from those activities during Lent?*
9. *What does it mean for you to be God’s instrument of peace and love?*

Prayer

“Lord, make me an instrument of peace. Where there is hatred let me sow love.” Amen

Dig Deeper

Matthew 10:7-13

last word

Pray continually this week: “Lord, make mean instrument of peace.
Where there is hatred let me sow love.”



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