

**February 14, 2016 – Lent 1**  
**Luke 4:1-13**  
**The Rev. Carenda Baker**

What gifts do you expect to receive on your Lenten journey this year? What gifts do you need to receive from God this Lent?

Lent is many things. Chief among them Lent is a time that can REVEAL AND HEAL. How does that happen? Our preparation for the Lenten journey really began in early January, when we heard Luke's account of Jesus' baptism. Even then, the work of revealing and healing was begun.

If you remember, we traveled to the font and looked at the window depicting Jesus' baptism. We remembered how Jesus GOT IN LINE with everybody else, did not set himself apart from the everyday Jack and Jill. How he was PRAYING right after being baptized, when the dove appeared and the VOICE SPOKE declaring him to be the Beloved Son of God.

We pick up in Luke's story today with 1<sup>st</sup> part of the Lenten journey & what happens right after Jesus' baptism. Jesus is filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and directed to the wilderness for 40 days of intense spiritual basic training, "Boot Camp" if you will, for the Son of God. It was not unlike a Vision Quest in the Native American tradition, when a young man goes out away from his tribe to face a major ordeal, to be tested. He faces his external and internal fears. He hones his physical skills and stamina. His courage is called forth, and the experience reveals who this young man will be. It shapes his identity and prepares him to take his place as an adult male leader and assume leadership responsibilities as a man in his tribal community.

Testing. Does anybody like testing? We have all sorts of responses to testing, don't we? We know about performance anxiety: What if I don't know enough? What if I can't remember? What if I freeze and my mind goes blank? What if I fail? The temptation is there to give up and say "I can't." To quit, throw up our hands and say "I can't."

About a year ago, in this diocese we were holding walkabouts, meetings to get to know and hear from the 3 candidates who could become our next diocesan bishop. I went to the walkabout @ St. John's, Carlisle. There were 2 men, David and Doug, and 1 woman, Audrey. I will never forget, when Audrey introduced herself, she said: "I am Audrey Scanlan. I am a child of God." Whoa! Sounds like such a little thing. I was mightily impressed. Her words said that she was clear about what grounds her. Her identity is grounded in her relationship with God.

Jesus is not out there politicking to be the next Messiah of the world. He is in the wilderness to get clear about his identity and what God is calling him to do. The big question, the big test for Jesus is what kind of Messiah will he be? Before any teaching, preaching or healing, before any calling out of disciples, Jesus has to answer that basic question. What will his mission and ministry look like? In the company of the Holy Spirit,

Jesus goes to the wilderness to be tested and tempted by God's chief Adversary, and therefore, Jesus' chief adversary, the devil.

*[Priest walks to the Temptation window].* I have never before seen a depiction of this biblical story in a stained glass window in a church. The Adversary looks like the main character in the children's book "Where the Wild Things Are". I sat in here on Thursday afternoon in one of the choir pews and meditated with my eyes open looking at this window. Truth be told – it sort of creeped me out! I would encourage you to take some time later to study this window. Look at the expressions. The Adversary indeed looks like a wild thing – pea green, scowling, claws out and bared for a fight.

The Adversary presents several attractive options for how Jesus might best use his abilities.

In Test 1, the strategy is to confuse wants and needs, to go for the quick fix. He has been out there for 40 days. Jesus is famished. I don't know how long a human being can go without food, but this must be starting to push the limits.

"If you are the Son of God", says the Adversary. Well, there is no question. Jesus is the Son of God. It was declared at his baptism.

So the Adversary, the devil begins: "OK, hot shot. If you are who you say you are, then show it by taking care of yourself first and demonstrating you can get what you most want. You should be able easily to turn those stones over there into bread. Go on- you know you're starving. You may as well use that power for something good and life-giving for yourself.

Thank goodness, as Paul wrote, Jesus knew the word was near him, indeed, on his lips and in his heart. God's living word, Scripture. Jesus, steeped in knowledge and love of Torah, quotes from the book of Deuteronomy: **"One does not live by bread alone."** Meaning what exactly? Physical need is real. The want is screaming from his gut - feed me. My belly's growling. But the quickest, most obvious and expedient option is not always the best choice. Food is good. Hunger is bad, right? Sometimes. I can just imagine Jesus' inner dialogue: "Father, what do you want me to do here? Come on, focus Jesus."

Satisfaction and pleasure, even to the point of satiation, are not bad things. Absolutely not! But in this moment, the question is "Who are you gonna serve? Everybody's gotta serve somebody." With a snap of his fingers, Jesus could have his hunger instantly gratified – a Pillsbury hot crusty dinner roll in one hand, an aromatic loaf of Italian garlic bread in the other. Truth be told, we prettily easily get them confused don't we, our wants and needs. Our consumer economy and slick advertising builds on just this confusion of wants and needs, and the demand to have what we want, and to get it right now. So, what kind of Messiah will he be? Thoughtful, looking at the bigger picture? Reacting on impulse, grabbing for what's easiest, most convenient?

Test #2. The devil's strategy in test 2 is to blur the lines between falsehood and truth. As we might say in this open political season, "Beware the spin factor". The Adversary leads Jesus up a bit higher, where they look out over land and human kingdoms, as far as the eye can see. The Adversary says, "Jesus you can have power, authority, and

influence over ALL THIS. It's mine right now and I can give it to anyone I please. It can be yours easily, for the right price. The price tag? Worship me, and the keys of these kingdoms are yours, to do as you will, as you see fit." God's word is near, hidden in Jesus' heart and comes readily to his lips: ***"It is written, Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."***

Power is incredibly attractive, isn't it – as attractive as any beautiful woman or handsome and charming man. What a lot of good Jesus could do with all that power. And humankind needs saving right? He could fix a lot of things with all that authority and power. Narrow the huge gap between the haves and have not's. Establish universal healthcare for everyone. Solidify military preparedness – equip the troops for any imaginable terrorist attack. Shore up international trade, make the shekel the strongest currency in the world. Revamp the tax system. Decide who are the worthiest outsiders and let only those cross the borders. "What would the Father say? What does the Holy I AM, Creator of all these kingdoms want?" Jesus knows and says it. God expects to be God, the only thing worthy of worship. 1<sup>st</sup> place. Top billing. Acknowledgement that great as human power is, it is utterly corruptible if not directed by God, the ultimate source of all power. Human power is not to become an idol, revered as the most holy thing. The Son of God would not be bought by the allure of political power, despite all its wonderful possibilities for doing good, even bringing some justice to the world. The truth: God is God. Humans are not gods.

Test #3. This test is very tricky indeed! It has actually been around a long time. It is at least as old as the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The Adversary is so adept at ever so innocently creating just a smidgeon of doubt, planting the tiniest seed of suspicion that maybe God shouldn't just automatically be trusted. Maybe God actually needs to prove God's self to humankind, to earn our faith and devotion. Why should we put all our faith in God? Is testing the odds really such a bad thing? The Adversary even shows that he knows Scripture by quoting from one of the psalms: "God will command the angels to protect you", Jesus. Nothing bad will happen. You know you could really make a name for yourself, become a household word even. You could really get some good media attention by throwing yourself off the temple. Something that spectacular would not be ignored. It would be on Facebook in an instant, just like the guy walking the tightrope over Niagara Falls, untethered and with no safety net.

And for the third time, the word is near Jesus, on his lips and in his heart and he quotes from Deuteronomy: ***"It is said, Do not put the Lord your God to the test."*** Game, set, and match to Jesus. When the devil had finished every test, he departed from Jesus ***"until an opportune time."***

What does that mean? It means the battle wasn't over. The Adversary would be back later with bigger guns. Next time, it would get way more personal – betrayal by one of Jesus' own.

As I studied these windows this week, I noticed that the window of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness is right next to the scene of the Last Supper. I counted the disciples in this scene – there are 11, plus Jesus. Judas has already left to do the dirty deed of turning Jesus over to those who would eliminate him.

There are at least 2 important things to remember from this story of Jesus facing the Adversary in the wilderness temptations.

1) As it was for Jesus, so it will be for each of us: We will always be flanked by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, AND the Adversary can be expected to be hanging around, looking for an opportune time to sandbag us – distract us, skew our priorities, appeal to our base selfishness and instinct for self-preservation, in order to thwart God's kingdom of healing, love, and justice coming more fully into this world. The Adversary will continue to be about deterring us from living out our identity, our calling as sons and daughters of God. The Adversary's favorite tools for getting us out of kilter in our journey of following Christ are confusion and chaos, fear, and scarcity thinking.

2) We will not always succeed when the tests come. The test might be whether to take the quick and easy way to eliminate a problem, rather than looking at the bigger, long-term picture. Why do surgery if a band-aid will stop the bleeding? It might be the test of how we will use our influence and authority. Will it be for self-promotion and self-protection, or in self-sacrifice for the sake of others? And the test might be that internal tug, the voice inside our heads that tries to convince us that achievement, celebrity, and popularity are the best ways to convince God that we ARE worthy of God's attention.

*[Priest crosses the aisle to the Crucifixion window and points].* This is where the journey of Lent will be taking us. To face death. And then new life *[Priest points to Resurrection window]*. The big revealing is that our failings are little deaths to our pride and self-sufficiency, our attempts to go it on our own without God's help, powering on ahead by relying on human ingenuity and pizzazz, rather than turning to God in ALL THINGS for direction and guidance.

What Lent invites us to do is honestly name and offer our failings up to God as quickly as possible, give them to the One whose way is to bring life out of death through mercy, forgiveness, and love. And after the revealing and offering it up comes the healing. Trusting in the goodness and faithfulness of God, we are invited to offer up our brokenness, our fears and failure, our misplaced loyalty, our selfishness and let God use these, to draw us closer to God's heart, shining the light of Christ shine through even these things to forgive, convert, and strengthen us. To make us holy.

This is the Good News, friends. When we come to the Table, God wants to meet the "real us" there, not the spiffy and cleaned up version, but the whole of who we are – mess and marvel, friend and foe, betrayer and beloved son, beloved daughter. We ALL are learners in the school of love and mercy. In need of healing - ALL. And this is exactly who God loves – every little part, every tiny cell of every one of us. This was the plan for saving humankind, because God simply loves us too much to leave us where God finds us. We cannot bear our burdens, our sin, the things that draw us away from the mercy and love of God alone. Bring all of yourself today. Come eat and drink at Christ's table with gratitude for the revealing, and faith in the healing. The journey is long. The destination is to be at home in God's loving eternal presence – healed, restored, made new for loving service. Hold out your hands to receive the morsel of

new life, the sip of grace. The bread of heaven and the cup of salvation. The healing and strength of the crucified and risen Christ. It will satisfy, and it will be enough.

Let us pray.

*[Priest sings]:*

*"I must tell Jesus, all of my trials. I cannot bear these burdens alone. In my distress he kindly will help me. He ever loves and cares for his own.*

*I must tell Jesus. I must tell Jesus. I cannot bear my burdens alone. I must tell Jesus. I must tell Jesus. Jesus can help me. Jesus alone."*