

Devotions for Week of February 18, 2018

LARGE-PRINT

1st Sunday of Lent

North East United Methodist Church

Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

Sunday, February 18, 2018

Read Matthew 4: 1-11.

Throughout the scriptures the wilderness was a testing...a place where one was emptied of the things of the world, not just for a day or a week, but for a lifetime...the wilderness was a place where one wrestled with their unbelief, with temptation, with their worldliness...a place where they experienced cleansing and new life. It was a place where God drove them deep into themselves, to prepare to meet God face-to-face, to prepare to enter the Promised Land, to prepare to begin their ministry.

Israel wandered in the desert for forty years because they did not trust God. God cleansed a nation of a sinful generation...filled a nation with trust rather than distrust. Unwilling to cross the Jordan River for the spies who had entered the Promised Land had reported giants of men...even though God had promised them this land, their fear kept them back...they did not trust God...they disobeyed God and voted not to go across...so God exiled them to the desert, to the wilderness, for forty years, that they might come to know, trust, and obey God. Deuteronomy 8:2 tells us, *“Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.”*

Elijah ran from Jezebel out of fear...He had just destroyed

the prophets of the false god Baal and Jezebel wanted him killed. Instead of trusting in God, he ran. He said to God, "*I have had enough, Lord.*" For forty days and forty nights, Elijah traveled through the wilderness...and God fed him and quenched his thirst...strengthened him...Through the wilderness Elijah walked until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. It was there on that mountain, after forty days in the wilderness, that he came face-to-face with God...

Jesus, before beginning His ministry, went into the wilderness to be tested, strengthened, and prepared for His journey...a journey that would eventually lead Him to Jerusalem, and a cross, and death.

Lent is a time for us to enter the wilderness. These forty days are a time to not simply give up a certain food or hobby...these forty days are a time to fight with our pride, our gossip, our hatred of others, our prejudices, our unwillingness to listen to someone who differs from us...it is a time to wrestle with the toughest issues...it is time to look at what is in our "history" when it comes to surfing the internet, how we treat our wives and if we are fulfilling our roles as Godly men, how much time we are spending in prayer and the Bible.

This is a season where we are to wrestle with the serious issues in our lives that are holding us back from growing into the likeness of Jesus Christ...we are to wrestle with God like Jacob wrestled on the shore of the Jabbok river, all night until we are completely spent...and at the end of the Lenten season, when we walk in on Easter Sunday, that which we have given up will be gone for good and we will be new creations, having taken one step closer to the goal of becoming just like Jesus. And like Israel we will learn to trust and obey God...like Elijah we will meet God face-to-face...like Jesus we will fight temptation and

be strengthened for our journey.

How are you approaching Lent? What are you facing, dealing with, working on? What temptations do you need to fight? What do you need to give up to move closer to God, becoming more and more like His Son, Jesus Christ?

Monday, February 19, 2018

Read Matthew 4: 1-11.

Look at the first temptation Jesus faced. *”During that time the devil came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread.’”* Jesus fought the temptation to fill Himself with the things of the world and instead filled with the things of God began His ministry. Satan tempted Jesus to make bread...Yet Jesus had emptied Himself of the physical desires that might control Him and fed instead on the Word of God.

Moses told the nation of Israel, *“Yes, God humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna food previously unknown to you and your ancestors. He did it to teach you that people do not live by bread alone; rather, we live by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”*

Now Satan tempts Christ Himself...Satan challenges Jesus to turn the stones into bread...to break His fast...to replace prayer with comfort, God with self...to fill His hunger with bread the world offers instead of the nourishment which God offers...Satan tempts Jesus to seek the gifts of the creator instead of the creator Himself...and it is the words of God...spoken by Moses, thousands of years before, out of Deuteronomy 8:3, that Jesus speaks...*”One does not live by bread alone; rather, we live by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”*

During the season of Lent we are called to empty

ourselves...and like Christ...we must empty ourselves of the temptation this world offers to feed us...Thousands of commercials everyday send images into our brains tempting us with possessions that will bring happiness, possessions that if we go out right away and purchase them, we will find the void within us filled.

Only God can fill the void within us.

As we prepare for Easter and the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ...let us empty ourselves of the feeling that we need the things of this world...let us empty ourselves of the belief that the things of this world will fill us...let us empty ourselves and allow our spirits to be filled everyday with the things of God. Everyday...let us read and pray...every day let us sit with our Heavenly Father...every day let us turn to Him first to fill us.

Tuesday, February 20, 2018

Read Matthew 4: 1-11.

The world tempts us to believe that it is all about us...What we want is most important...We deserve the best. Our commercials throw messages at us every day telling us that we are “the center of the universe;” everything revolves and should revolve around us...we should do whatever we feel like doing without any consideration of others or of what God would think...We deserve it. Commercials shout out slogans... “*Have It Your Way;*” “*You Deserve a Break Today;*” “*Because YOU are worth it;*” “*Obey your thirst;*” “*Where do YOU want to go today;*” “*Just do it;*” and Coca-Cola’s simple slogan, “*Enjoy.*”

In Satan’s second temptation, Satan basically tells Jesus, “Jesus, you are so important God would never let anything happen to you, so throw yourself off of here. Go ahead. You

know that it's all about you.”

In fact, Satan was tempting Jesus to take things into His own hands...to take His focus off His Heavenly Father and place this thoughts on Himself...Jumping from the pinnacle of the Temple...150 feet up...falling through the air to land safely in front of the people and priests...what an entrance that would have been...many would have bowed before Him...followed Him...

Yet Jesus knew that it wasn't about Him...

Are we giving in to the devil's temptation for self-promotion, self-preservation, and self-centeredness...to place ourselves at the center of the universe...instead of making our decisions, going about our day, recognizing who is truly at the center...and allowing Him, our Heavenly Father, to guide and direct us, our plans, our actions, our words. What if a businessman took that approach? Goals of money and name making, he'd shelve. God reflecting would dominate. And your body? [Instead of] thinking, “It's mine; I'm going to enjoy it.” God-centered thinking acknowledges, “It's God's; I have to respect it.” We'd see our suffering differently. “My pain proves God's absence” would be replaced with “My pain expands God's purpose.” Everything would change if we took ourselves out of the center and revolved our lives around the Son.

Pray that God will help you live with the knowledge that it's not about you...it is all about Him!

Wednesday, February 21, 2018

Read Matthew 4: 1-11.

In Satan's third temptation, the devil offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the world...and the devil states that these kingdoms are his to give. The kingdoms of this world are at odds with the

Christian life, with Jesus Christ and all He taught and died for. The Bible is clear that we are temporary residents to this world...we are foreigners living here. The writer of Hebrews speaks of those of the faith who have gone on before us. Hebrews 11:13 states, *“All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it. They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth.”*

As *“foreigners and nomads”* here on earth we are told in God’s Word to be watchful, careful, to resist the powers of this world that would draw us away from our faith. I Peter 2:11 states, *“Dear friends, I warn you as ‘temporary residents and foreigners’ to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls.”*

Do we find ourselves focused more on the things of this world than the things of God? Are we tempted away from God by the things of the world? Pray that God will give you the strength to *“keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls”* and to help you focus on Him.

Thursday, February 22, 2018 & Friday, February 23, 2018

Read Jeremiah 18: 1-12; 2 Corinthians 3:18.

In Jeremiah 18, we read how God takes His prophet Jeremiah down to the potter’s house and shows him the potter spinning the clay and molding it into a vessel. At times the potter has to smash the clay and begin anew or work it over to make it smoother. Like the potter with his clay, God molds us...molds us and fashions us...but only if we allow Him can we truly get to the imperfections deep within. God won’t force Himself deep inside. We have to go with Him into the

wilderness, deep within ourselves...allowing Him to help us root out everything that is contrary to the One who created us.

Pray that God will help you grow throughout this Lent more into the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ. Take time tonight and tomorrow to reflect on your life...on the areas that need work...on the temptations you face...on the things of the world that pull you away from God. Lift up your faults, your temptations, your mistakes, your shortcomings to God and ask Him to mold you, to fashion you, to make you into the man or woman of God you were created to be. Take the “next step” today and invite God to change your life.

Saturday, February 24, 2018

Read and Reflect On:

**INVITATION TO THE OBSERVANCE
OF LENTEN DISCIPLINE**

&

**Don't Forget to
Invite Someone to Church Tomorrow!**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: the early Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church that before the Easter celebration there should be a forty-day season of spiritual preparation. During this season converts to the faith were prepared for Holy Baptism. It was also a time when persons who had committed serious sins and had separated themselves from the community of faith were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness, and restored to participation in the life of the Church. In this way, the whole congregation was reminded of the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ

and the need we all have to renew our faith. I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to observe a holy Lent: by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's Holy Word. To make a right beginning of repentance, as a mark of our mortal nature, let us now bow before our Creator and Redeemer in a moment of silence and reflection.

***“Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.”***

-Psalm 51:10