

Mark 1:9-15 (NRSV)

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.

11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.

13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God,

15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Matthew 4:1-11 (NRSV)

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. 2 He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was famished. 3 The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." 4 But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.' "

7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is 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 glory, 9 and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.' "

11 Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

In the Wilderness

I've never been to the desert, so I can't describe what it's like. Maybe someday I'll get to visit a biblical desert. However, I have thought about spending a night in the desert and thought about what it must be like.

In 1995, I was in Paraguay. I lived in the capital city of Asunción. The church I attended was having a youth group retreat, and I set off late in the evening in the church minivan - just me driving and my stuff in the back. The retreat was in a place called Nueva Colombia, which was about a two-hour drive by car. One hour was on paved roads and one hour was on unpaved dirt roads.

It was already evening when we went on the paved road, and it was already dark when we reached the dirt road. I entered a village called Emboscada, and there were no houses around, just dirt roads with nothing in sight. (As I later learned, the area around the retreat is a desert, so it's not farmed land.)

There were no streetlights on the unpaved road, so the headlights of the car became the only light. Out of curiosity, I tried turning off the car's lights. Suddenly, the lights went off in the running car, and it was pitch black around me. It was so funny, so I turned the lights off and on by myself as I drove.

As I remember, it was a dirt road, but I was running at 30-40 mph. And while I was running with the lights off for a while, I experienced a crisis. The right passenger side tire hit a sand dune and spun around, and the car began to zigzag. The car seemed to be about to flip over. I couldn't see anything in front of me. I remembered only one thing: when driving on a dirt road, never put on the brakes. The car was in fourth gear, and I downshifted from fourth to second. Then I remembered one more thing: when the car is skidding, you should turn the steering wheel toward the skid. All this happened very quickly and in that short time, I prayed to God to save me. Fortunately, the car stopped, and I sat there for a while. A horror surrounded me.

There was no navigation, no maps, and of course, no cell phones.

I got out of the car and calmed myself. What could I have done if the car had flipped? I realized that I wouldn't be playing with the lights in the future.

As I got used to the darkness, I gradually took in my surroundings, illuminated by the stars, and I wondered how many days I could spend in a place like this. I learned that I couldn't last a day because there are a lot of ants, scorpions, and serpents which I hate. I stayed there for a while, and then I left for the retreat. It was an event that taught me what it's like to be alone, in isolation

It's significant that Jesus was in the wilderness before his ministry began. In fact, the wilderness, in some ways, symbolized death for the Israelites. However, the wilderness is also a life-giving place. All of the descendants of the Israelites who entered the land of Canaan were born in the wilderness. The wilderness is a life-giving place when God is with us, but is also a place where we cannot live without God.

Although it isn't described in Mark's Gospel, it's where Jesus is tested by Satan with three temptations. The key to Satan's temptations is his strategy to separate us from God. Satan's three temptations addressed basic human needs: bodily nourishment, affirmation, and power.

The wilderness is a place where you're not allowed the mercy of a drop of water.

It's a place where there's nothing to eat, which is why the tempter asked Jesus to turn stones into bread and eat them. I don't think it's a bad suggestion: eat and live, not die.

However, it's in those places that Jesus talks about living not just by bread alone, but by the Word of God. The problem with most of us is that we think we are happy because we possess something, but Jesus is saying that our true happiness comes from God.

The wilderness is a lonely place with no people, so there's no one to lean on, and it's not easy to be without people. It's not strange to want a miracle from God in a place that's not easy to live in. But Jesus teaches us not to put God to the test. God is already taking care of Jesus as he spends time in the wilderness. God is always there to help us. We don't need to try to test Him.

The final test is when Satan offers to show him all the kingdom of earth and their power. Why would we need authority in the wilderness? Perhaps because if you have power, you don't need God. If you have strength and power, you don't need to serve God. Jesus tells Satan to fear and serve God.

Lent has begun. It's a time to reflect a little more on God. Maybe the world is still telling us that we can live without God, but Jesus tells us today that we become who we are only when we are with God.

We are in a wilderness without the mercy of a drop of water, a place where to the human eye there is only death, but with God there is life. It's a place where there is hope. There is hope.

And I want you to have that hope, and I want you to have that desire, and I want you to think about what are some of the things that you can think of as hope this week. Will you share those things with your family and friends?

I often see the inside and outside of this church, and last week I looked in the kitchen and imagined people eating the food I made. Jesus said we should live by the word of God, but we also need to eat well to live. I dream that if we can share not only God's word but also food well, we can be a church where if someone comes and says, " Give me something to eat," we can give it to them. Is my hope a good hope, and what are your hopes? Let's fulfill those hopes in God together.

Let us pray.

God, we thank you for being with us. Help us to see not only the difficult and challenging situations, but to see You.

Help us to see the value behind the problem, and help us to see you, so that we can overcome and win.

In Jesus's name, we pray. Amen.