

“Lost & Found”

First Presbyterian Church
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Old Testament Lesson: Psalm 91:1-12

New Testament Lesson: Luke 4:1-13

Saint Augustine was a fourth-century theologian whose writings greatly influenced how we as Christians understand and relate to God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. But Augustine was not always a theologian. He started out as a philosopher who deeply desired fame and status, but he found that these things didn't make him happy. Nothing he accomplished was giving him the contentment he desired. Finally, Augustine turned to God and said, “Our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.”

That is what Jesus is showing us in his 40 days in the wilderness. Nothing in this world will give us the rest and the peace and the joy that only God can give.¹ As we begin our 40 days of self-examination in the season of Lent, we turn to Jesus' 40 days of wilderness wandering for inspiration, insight and guidance.

The first thing we learn about Jesus' 40 days is that he ate nothing. Why? Was that circumstance or choice? Did Jesus choose to fast during those 40 days? I mean, even John the Baptizer found wild honey and locusts to eat during his time in the wilderness. So we can assume Jesus chose to fast. But why?

Aside from any health benefits of fasting, coming to know physical hunger and overcoming provides great insights into what's really important in life. That is what Lent is all about – coming to know and appreciate what's really important in life. Are you open to that-knowing what's really important in life? If so, then let's see what Jesus discovered.

Jesus was in the wilderness and he was hungry. In fact, Luke tells us he was famished, and the devil tried to use his physical hunger against him, saying “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.”

Now, scripture tells us that Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’” But how quickly do you think Jesus came up with that answer? It's easy to imagine he was offered food and immediately had the right answer. But think about it.

¹ Brooks, David. *The Road to Character*. New York: Random House, 2015. 194.

Luke tells us that Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness tempted by the devil. I don't know about you, but I can't go half a day without food and not get grumpy, right honey? Yes, if we think about it, Jesus must have been hungry for days, but I maybe he didn't get grumpy, at least not as grumpy as I get.

No, instead, Jesus drew from a greater source of nourishment. He was sustained day after day by scripture. "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." That's Deuteronomy 8:3. That's what Jesus meditated on to overcome his physical hunger, 40 days in the wilderness, famished, with only scripture to sustain him.

So, the question is, do you allow the word of God to feed your soul? If not, you're missing out on great sustenance, a spiritual food that can fill you with joy and peace. That's what we get – joy and peace – when we let the word of God shape our actions, give voice to what comes out of our mouths.

Think about it. If we were to pay as much attention to what comes out of our mouths as we do with the food we put into our mouths, WOW, wouldn't this be a better world!?!

And that's what's available to you during these 40 days – a better world, for you, your family and friends, and for that stranger or enemy who raises your blood pressure along the way, by her words, his actions. You don't have to respond defensively. Instead, let the word of God guide your responses in life.

The next thing Luke tells us about Jesus' 40 days is that he was shown all the kingdoms of the world and told, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority. ... If you ... will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered the devil, saying, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

First, Jesus was hungry, and he discovered that the only thing that could truly carry him through those days was the word of God. Now he's offered power and fame. These are things most people – too many people – in this world crave, and Jesus goes right to the source, right to God.

Jesus knows that God is the source of any power or recognition we might have. He knows how wonderful things would be if we would just use our power and influence in service to God. And yet, that's not the way of this world, is it, for the most part? Don't get sucked into that! Don't let the world tell you that you have to have more power than the next guy to be worth anything. Humility and service is a greater show of power than bragging and grabbing.

And what about recognition? Don't let the world say you have to be the coolest, most fashionable person in your group. God looks at the beauty within, and when we do that, we are all glorious, all the coolest, most fashionable.

Forty days of nothing but beautiful people inside and out using their God-given gifts and talents in service to the Lord. What could be better?!? And that's what's available to you during these 40 days and beyond, when we first look at the beauty within, mindful of the true source and purpose of our God-given power, our gifts and talents.

Finally, Jesus is taken to Jerusalem, the place where he will be put on trial, unjustly condemned, brutally beaten and crucified. He's placed on the pinnacle of the temple. That's like standing on the steeple of this church. What would that be like-being up there where you could fall or be pushed off. Pretty scary stuff.

So here's Jesus up on the steeple of the church and the devil says, go ahead, jump. It's right there in scripture: "He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you." Jesus is all alone, in the wilderness, being toyed with by the devil. Do you think he was afraid? I know I would be; I know I have been. We have all been in scary situations where fear takes over. What do you do? Where do you turn?

Jesus turns to his faith. "Do not put the Lord your God to the test," he says. In other words, I don't have to be afraid of falling or being pushed. I know God will protect me, lift me up when I'm down. You know that, right? You know that God will protect you; we know that, right? And yet, how often do we act in fear instead of faith? How much of what we suffer is because we act out of fear and put our faith in something or someone other than God?

Whatever you're afraid of right now – being alone, running out money, facing a medical crisis please know that nothing you face in life can get the better of you, as long as you draw near to God. God will never leave you, God will always provide for you, and God has a role for you in this world, an important role in building up the kingdom and sharing the blessings of God with those in need.

That's what's available to you during these 40 days – freedom from all your fears, the beauty of seeing gifts and talents used in service to the Lord, and the very word of God filling your heart and your mind, feeding your soul.

Find time each day during this season of Lent to think back on all that Jesus faced in the wilderness – hunger, the lure of power and recognition, and the fear of physical, emotional and spiritual harm.

And then remember where Jesus turned in his hour of need – to the word of God in scripture, the power and humility of God in worship and service, and faith in God to always be there for us. I can't think of a better way to grow spiritually during Lent than to focus on scripture, worship, service and faith.

These are the blessings Jesus relied on in his wilderness moments, and these are the blessings he gives to us. Take a moment right now to think about how you could, in the coming days and weeks, engage more deeply in scripture, worship, service and faith. What is God placing on your heart right now. I'll give you a minute or two to think about that, imagine it, commit to it – scripture, worship service and a deeper faith. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Holy God, we thank you for this season of Lent, during which you invite us to come before you in self-examination, to confess and be renewed and healed.

We enter this season eagerly, anticipating that, like Jesus in the wilderness, there are things we need to set aside in order to go deeper in our faith.

Enable us to see past the immediate satisfaction of our wants and desires, that we may choose instead the true blessings of your presence and work among us.

As we enter the Lenten season, we thank you, Jesus, for walking along side us in this journey toward a deeper, more fulfilling faith.

May we emerge prepared to serve you with renewed passion and joy.

We pray all this in your powerful name, using the words that you taught us, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**