

“Seeking God’s Face”

Psalm 27: 1-9; Matthew 4: 1-11

Just a few weeks ago, we were focusing on the Baptism of the Lord. And I am grateful to Patti for stepping in while I was in the bed.

But immediately after the baptism of Jesus comes these words, “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” He did not get a moment to bask in his new identity. He was not able to savor the fact that he is the Son of God, the Beloved, like scripture declared. He was unable to grasp what the baptism meant! Or was he?

As hard as it might seem, the baptism of Jesus and the temptations in the wilderness go hand in hand. In fact, if they were not adjacent in scripture, we would have a whole new problem on our hands.

For when we declare ourselves or our child to be baptized, the struggle begins. The tension develops. The “war” if you will, starts. For in our baptism, we declare we belong to God. We are God’s child. We are people who sit on God’s side.

Which is automatically contrary to the world...to the “other” kingdom. And that Kingdom is vying for our attention and our allegiance.

In fact, it was clearly pictured in the temptations of Christ. The three clear temptations of Christ are the very temptations which we face. And there is often a regular sense of being in the wilderness. In that foreign land where we find ourselves often struggling on where we stand. Struggling about to whom we owe our lives.

While the concept of “wilderness” seems rather stark and isolated and dangerous, it does give a picture of our daily lives. It does illustrate the world in which we live. It does raise up the tension in which we find ourselves.

Jesus was in the wilderness 40 days and 40 nights. It is interesting about the meaning of “40” in the Bible. 40 marks a moment of transition, transformation, and the leading to a new life.

40 years the Israelites were on their journey to the Promised Land.

40 days God flooded the earth.

40 days between the Resurrection and the Ascension of Jesus.

40 days Moses spent on Mt. Sinai receiving the 10

Commandments

40 days Jonah warned ancient Nineveh about the destruction to come.

So, the Bible is very clear that 40 means a time of transition, a time of transformation, a time when life is going to be different and new.

We all have our “40 days” experiences when things will be different. Transition from our home to a retirement home; time before a new job begins; time before retirement; time for the first grandchild to appear. It is a time of going from the “Old” to the “New.”

In Jesus case, he was going through his 40 days being tested to see about his new life. And it is interesting how Jesus dealt with the three temptations.

The first temptation was to fill one’s hunger by one’s own strength. And Jesus says, “One does not live by bread alone.”

The second temptation to test the might and power of God by being enticed to throw himself off the temple. To which he said, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”

And the final temptation to worship before a false god to which Jesus responded, “Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.”

Regular temptations we all face:

1. Being self-sufficient by my own powers.
2. Being tempted about power and might over others.
3. Being fooled about who is #1 in one's life.

It happens daily for us. It is regular. It is almost routine. Jesus made it through. But, after all, he is Jesus. But what about you and me. What hope, what helps are there for us lowly human beings?

I purposely tied Psalm 27 to Matthew 4. For I believe in Psalm 27 are some helpful clues about dealing with temptations, with tests, with just living everyday life.

The Psalm has two parts. It is a Psalm of David. It begins talking about the fears and anxieties in life.

- when evil doers assail me.
- when an army encamps around me.
- when war rises up against me.

The Psalmist has these concerns. These temptations. These struggles. Yet with confidence, he declares the Lord is my light and my salvation. God gives us a way. God delivers us. We need

not think we have to have all the answers. We need not yield to the devil which Jesus faced in the temptations.

For we have the light: we have the way.

For we have salvation: we have been delivered.

The Lord is my stronghold of my life - of whom shall I be afraid? Fear is the biggest enemy for each of us. We are afraid what someone will think. We are afraid we will offend someone. We worry about being on the wrong side of the argument.

Yet, the freedom we have in God assures us we are not alone, and we do not have to figure out everything!

The Psalmist then entertains a new approach:

“One thing I ask of the Lord: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.”

The assurance of that possibility enables us to have a quiet and peaceful life. Knowing that we are in God’s house and with God. However, that will not protect us from

the temptations and the tests. That will not save us from having to face the various tests in life.

It does, however, provide us a home base. It does give us a starting point. It does ground us in the right place in life to face whatever comes our way.

From which he Psalm makes another plea or request: “My heart says, ‘seek his face.’ Your face, Lord, do I seek.” He goes on in his request to God, “Do not hide your face from me.”

It is an interesting twist in the Psalm...seeking the face of God. So, what does that mean since no one has seen God?”

The phrase is talking about a sense of intimacy with God. Getting to know God on a personal and a deeply spiritual level. Think about the image. You have a whole new experience when you are face to face with someone. You see their reactions. You see their facial expressions. You have a sense of personal intimacy with that person.

The same is true with God. When we see God, when we seek God’s face, our lives are transformed and changed. We think differently. We see differently. We imagine

differently. We have moved to a new level of our relationship with God.

It seems such is possible when we worship on a regular weekly basis. Not whenever we feel like it. It's possible when we read and study scripture learning insights from fellow learners. Such study takes discipline and again not whenever we want to. It happens in our prayer life as we take time daily to commune with God, to raise up concerns for people by their name, to open ourselves to hear God's response.

Seeking the face of God is our desire to be close and personal with God. And from that foundation to deal with the tests and temptations of life. Because we are not alone. Because we cannot have all the answer. Because our allegiance is with God and not just with ourselves.

It seems these words from scripture are instructive for all of us in our daily lives. Yet today as we install Elders on the Session, I find these words very appropriate for the Elders we are installing as well as for all of the Session. As leaders of this congregation, no other person or group needs to seek the face of God more than these. These folks are the spiritual leaders of this congregation. And how shall they lead...

-when people question their decisions.

-when they have to make a hard decision, everyone will not like.

-when they have to decide the priorities of the church with limited resources.

-when they need assistance from members of the church and only the same ones are willing to help.

-when they have to face a future that is unclear about the direction and stability of an aging congregation.

-when they have to determine which groups may be appropriate using the church facilities.

-when they have to decide what color to paint the church parlor or fellowship hall, much less the sanctuary.

In the Presbyterian Church, Elders are not representatives of the congregation like people are in Congress or in the state legislature. No, Elders have to be willing to seek the mind of Christ to lead them. Elders have to lead with their conscience of what is the direction of Christ. Elders are to listen to the congregation, but they do not represent the congregation. Instead, they are to represent Christ.

And sometimes that is not what

everyone wants. They, of all groups in the church, need the good news in Psalm 27. They have to seek the face of God and be in an intimate relationship with God. So, they can do the will of God.

And part of the obligation of the congregation rests in questions you will be asked this morning:

1. Do we, the members of the church, accept these folks as ruling elders chosen by God through the voice of the Congregation to lead us in the way of Christ?

2. Do we agree to pray for them, to encourage them, to respect their decisions, and to follow as they guide us, serving Jesus Christ, who alone is head of the church?

So, think about your response.

Because if you say “YES,” you will be seeking the face of God with them because you said you will pray for them, encourage them and respect their decisions...even if you don't agree with those decisions. For all of us are serving Jesus Christ, who alone is head of the church.

Seek the face of God is not just talk or spiritual mumbo jumbo. No, it is hard work. Yet it equips us to withstand the temptations and tests that face us in life and in the church.

Therefore, **SEEK THE FACE OF GOD!**

PSALM 27

1 The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

2 When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh— my adversaries and foes— they shall stumble and fall.

3 Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.

4 One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.

5 For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock.

6 Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

7 Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!

8 "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!" Your face, Lord, do I seek.

9 Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!

Matthew 4: 1-11

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

2 He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards 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 splendor;

9 and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

10 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.