

“Reaching Out”

Message by DD Adams

Providence United Methodist Church

1st Sunday In Lent

March 9, 2014

Today’s gospel lesson is taken from the book of Matthew, chapter 4, verses 1 through 11. I’ll be reading from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson. Next Jesus was taken into the wild by the Spirit for the Test. The Devil was ready to give it. Jesus prepared for the Test by fasting forty days and forty nights. That left him, of course, in a state of extreme hunger, which the Devil took advantage of in the first test: “Since you are God’s Son, speak the word that will turn these stones into loaves of bread.”

Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy: “It takes more than bread to stay alive. It takes a steady stream of words from God’s mouth.” For the second test the Devil took him to the Holy City. He sat him on top of the Temple and said, “Since you are God’s Son, jump.” The Devil goaded him by quoting Psalm 91: “He has placed you in the care of angels. They will catch you so that you won’t so much as stub your toe on a stone.”

Jesus countered with another citation from Deuteronomy: “Don’t you dare test the Lord your God.” For the third test, the Devil took him to the peak of a huge mountain. He gestured expansively, pointing out all the earth’s kingdoms, how glorious they all were. Then he said, “They’re yours—lock, stock, and barrel. Just go down on your knees and worship me, and they’re yours.” Jesus’ refusal was curt: “Beat it, Satan!” He backed his rebuke with a third quotation from Deuteronomy: “Worship the Lord your God, and only him. Serve him with absolute single-heartedness.” The Test was over. The Devil left. And in his place,

angels! Angels came and took care of Jesus' needs. This is God's word for God's people. Thanks be to God. God bless the reading, hearing, and understanding of your word today.

After Jesus' baptism, he plunges headlong from a spiritual high place to a low one—the testing in the desert. Jesus was being tempted by the Devil, and tested by God to show us he would be faithful to his mission. The Devil would pull out every stop he could to tempt Jesus to use his gifts for selfish reasons.

The temptation in the desert was a struggle that happened on the inside of Jesus. That's how Satan tempts—inwardly. He makes suggestions through our minds, puts thoughts in our heads, and stirs up desires within. He'll tempt us to keep our gifts for ourselves rather than using them for others. Satan will tell us it's easier to “do our own thing” and that we can get what we want and what we think we need easier by choosing our own way.

When we use our gifts for others we're fulfilling our spiritual mission, and that means reaching out to others relationally and establishing a connection. We're called to come out of our isolation and to give ourselves for others. Jesus was strong on the inside—his heart, soul, and mind were completely given to God. He resisted the temptations and stayed connected to his strong power source. He chose rightly in the wilderness, and he used his spiritual gifts for the sake of others and reached out. That's what we're called to do. The kingdom of God grows one person at a time—one by one. It's all about connecting and establishing relationships.

Lent is a time of repentance, fasting and preparation for the coming of Easter. It's a time of introspection as we think about our relationship with God. It's during these 40 days we think more about giving ourselves for others. The forty days represents the time Jesus spent in the wilderness, and how he endured the

temptation of Satan. Jesus was faithful. He was victorious. He used his gifts for others and fulfilled his spiritual mission.

What about you? Are you fulfilling your spiritual mission? Are you reaching out to others you've never met and establishing relationships? Fulfilling our spiritual mission can't be accomplished in isolation. We must connect with others and get involved in their life. My challenge to you is this. Because Jesus was victorious, we now have access to that same power. Use your spiritual gifts and reach out to others. Holy relational God, move in us and compel us to reach out to others. Bless us dear Lord so we might be a blessing to others. Amen.