

SERMON – THE 1ST SUNDAY IN LENT – 10 FEBRUARY 2008
St. John's Anglican Church, Greensboro, North Carolina

Matthew 4:1 (KJV)

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

We are now officially in Lent. Like Jesus who was led into the wild and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, we now have been directed to go to the wilderness of our lives for forty days and forty nights, to fast, to meditate, to face the demons that beset us all.

Immediately after his baptism by John in the Jordan River, Jesus was led by the spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to begin the preparation for his ministry.

We, too, must, prepare ourselves for the ministry that God has chosen for each of us. We must be first led to that ministry and we must be strengthened by the direction of the Holy Spirit. We must go into the wilderness.

As a side note, when we talk of the Holy Spirit as the Comforter, we are using the old meaning of the word comfort, which then meant strengthen. So using that meaning when we talk of the Holy Spirit being the Comforter, we are really saying the Holy Spirit is the Strengthener.

In other words, we are saying that instead of getting a warm, fuzzy feeling, we are being provided strength, heavenly strength.

Unfortunately, most of the time the warm, fuzzy feeling is all that we are looking for.

What is in it for me.

Again, we are in Holy Lent. Again, we are directed to join Jesus in his fasting and in his praying. Again, we are directed to look at the excess in our lives and to give it away.

Again, the Holy Spirit is there to give us strength to face the temptations and the trials of our lives. The Holy Spirit is there, if we let him, to provide the strength which none of us have on our own to come face-to-face with our selves as we really are, with our failings, our foibles, our own set of petty, tacky sins.

We hear, *1 John 1:8 (KJ)For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;*

And again in, *Romans 3:23 (KJV) If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

Lets face it we all have our own set of pet, comfortable sins, comfortable in the modern sense of the word.

That reminds me of the story of the two ladies having coffee one morning, when one of them told her friend, “I have something to confess to you. I really enjoy having a drink or two before dinner. Sometimes, I feel so guilty about that.”

The other lady replied, “Don’t feel bad. All of us have our own sins. In fact, mine is gossip and I can’t wait until I can get to the next church circle meeting.”

Lent gives us all the opportunity to face those things in our lives and to face our life itself as it relates to our journey with God.

As a teen and into my early twenties I was a long distance hiker. I learned early to take as little as I could carry with me, just enough food to sustain me, to get rid of anything that I didn’t need for the hike and to have good directions, map, so forth.

Lent is no different. Lent is a microcosm of Christian Life in that we should learn to eat just enough to sustain us, give away everything that we do not need and develop a prayer life that connects us to God through Jesus Christ, a prayer life that is interior as well as exterior.

The Church gives each of us Lent to enable us to develop the Christian disciplines that we need to make our life journey, a journey that is often hard and frustrating, full of opposition and contrary to modern thought and practice.

We often long for peace in our lives. Lent prepares us to face the day-to-day warfare that we will, in all probability, face the rest of our mortal lives. Lent is, according to our spiritual life, either basic training or a refresher field exercise in our preparation to war against the forces of the world, the flesh and the Devil.

Jesus never promised that life would be easy. He never promised us that once we began to follow Him we have no more worries or troubles. What he did say is **Matthew 16:24 (KJV)** *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*

Jesus also said, **Matthew 10:34 (KJV)** *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.*

And Paul also wrote, **Ephes. 6:12 (KJV)** *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

We are now just leaving the comfort of the world and getting on the trail of this year's Lenten journey. What provisions have you brought along that will weight you down when the trail gets steep and rocky? What have you packed away that you do not need and have not disposed of before you began? How are the directions that you have?

Ask yourselves these questions today. Be honest with yourselves.

The road ahead is hard. The road ahead is sometimes more difficult than we can manage ourselves. There are going to be mountains to scale, rivers to cross and those that wish us harm to encounter.

But we are not alone. However, there are rules to follow as on any long hike and our guide expects us all to follow them on this most important journey of our lives, our journey to Heaven.

Amen.