

AN OPPORTUNE TIME

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At the beginning of this service we prayed our way through the Great Litany. How appropriate that we say "From all evil and wickedness; from sin; from the crafts and assaults of the devil; and from everlasting damnation, Good Lord, deliver us" and then read the story of the temptation of Jesus.

Someone shared with me this week a critique of the Church of England from a course at Liberty University that claimed that the Church of England and the Anglican Communion is a cult that among other things doesn't believe in the devil or Satan. However, I think our opening prayer and the required renunciations of the devil in our Baptism service should put that to rest. We may have some different ideas and theologies surrounding whatever you want to label the forces of evil as, but I for one can only explain many of the horrors of the world as the work of evil. Evil exists, of that I am sure. I totally agree with C. S. Lewis when he says, "The greatest victory of the devil is that so few people believe he exists." Certainly the writer of Luke has a fairly strong theology of evil and demons.

The temptation of Jesus by the devil or Satan has much to teach us in today's world and much of this hinges on the final two words of our passage, " he departed from him until an opportune time." An opportune time or in the Message translation "lying in wait for an opportunity" is an interesting concept to play with. This prompted the line of meditation about what is an opportune time?

In this case the reference is to the later passage where the devil enters into Judas and leads him to turn Jesus in. There is more in this passage though than this simple foreshadowing of the future.

In Luke the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness. This is a very different feel from Mark where he is driven into the wilderness by the Spirit. This leading into the wilderness has a feel of planning, deliberation and love. Jesus is not sent in and abandoned, but is led, guided if you will by the Spirit.

The Wilderness theme has always been strong in the Bible. The wilderness that Luke is talking about is a desert wilderness. Deserts are stark, dry, places but they have their own type of beauty. This is wilderness that the readers of Luke would have understood. The early Desert Fathers in imitation of Jesus went into the wilderness to seek God in the stark isolation. From that wilderness time came some of the great writings of the early church and the beginnings of the monastic movement.

Wildernesses however can come in many shapes, sizes and types. For many of us the picture of wilderness can be very different. Stop for a moment and think about this. What does your wilderness look like?

Wilderness is not necessarily bad. Wilderness can be a place of testing, but also of growth and opportunity. We can always learn something in the wilderness. That applies whether our wilderness is physical, emotional or spiritual. In reality, wilderness time is an opportunity, or in Luke's final two words in this passage an opportune time. I found that concept of an opportune time to be very important as I meditated on this scripture.

An opportune time for the devil is also an opportune time for God. The challenge is to remember to seek the Lord in good times as well as in times of trial and temptation. Very few come into my office to tell me how great their life is. They usually come to my door in that moment of crisis. However the devil can enter in at times of great success, when we forget that all we have, all we are comes from God.

The truth is that those times of temptation for Satan are usually when we are at our weakest. They are often when we feel least connected to God. Yet St. Ignatius would tell us that it is in those times of what he calls desolation, when God seems furthest that God is actually closest to us, just waiting for us to reach out to God. This is what the 2nd Song of Isaiah is talking about. Seek the Lord while he wills to be found; call upon him when he draws near.

So what are the temptations that stand between you and God this Lent? What are the temptations that will lead you in a different way than the Spirit that led Jesus, is calling you to go. What are those temptations that want to draw you away from God at this opportune time?

Let me tempt you with how the Spirit has led me to plan this Lent for you and St. Aidan's. Now let me be clear this Lent has just fallen together in an incredible pattern of opportunity not of my planning, but then it was the Spirit that led Jesus into his wilderness. So I am content to let the Spirit lead us into our wilderness time of Lent.

This Sunday February 21st is the Great Litany and the story of the temptation of Jesus. This Sunday we turn our focus to repentance as we begin our walk through the wilderness of Lent. Before we can move forward, we must first of all look inward at our own souls and what we have done that puts distance between God and ourselves. This is the essence of sin. Sin is anything that pulls or pushes us away from a relationship with God.

The Second Sunday of Lent February 28 will be a Litany of Healing at both services. Once we have confessed our sins in the Great Litany it is time to ask for healing. That will be the focus of the Second Sunday in Lent. To my knowledge we have never done a formal liturgy for healing. Bring your own needs for healing and those of others to this moving service next week

Once healed it is time to start to turn our focus outward. Did you know that the corporate name for the Episcopal Church begins with "The Foreign and Domestic Missionary Society"? From our origins we have been a missionary church, called to serve those locally and in other countries. This Lent I want us to look at two very important missionary fields that we are involved in here at St. Aidan's.

I hope that this year as a Lenten discipline you will consider fasting from some extra and saving the money that you normally spend and donate it to one of the following causes.

SETON HOUSE SUNDAY March 7

March 7th we will hear from and have a visit from the staff at Seton House. There will be a presentation at 9:30 and an opportunity to visit the house at that time or after the 10:30 service. I know many of you have never been inside Seton House and most do not know of their extensive programs. This is far more than just a shelter for boys and girls, but a ministry that reaches out throughout the beach area with programs on anger management, outreach to homeless children on the beachfront and many other ministries. They are in desperate straights and the governor's new budget may cause even greater hardship for them. I hope that you will all bring paper goods that Sunday so we can shower them with supplies that day.

SERMON IN MOTION MARCH 21

I want to try something totally different this Lent. Sunday March 21 we will experience what I call a sermon in motion. Rather than just hearing about the gospel, my sermon about the gospel will be replaced by doing the gospel. This will be our Stop Hunger Now event We will have just one service at 10:00. I hope people from both services will join together to pack 10,000 meals for people in Haiti.

For the food packing event to happen we need to raise at least \$2500 for this event to happen. This program is especially appropriate for a family effort. There will be a chart in the narthex for you to pledge or you can simply put a check in the plate with Stop Hunger Now in the memo. By the way the food packed in January has already been delivered to grateful people.

I would also encourage you to invite a friend that Sunday. I see this as a wonderful chance to introduce people to our church and show them what a special place St. Aidan's is.

I also have a great series of Sunday Evening services with four different types of Evening Prayer services, dinner each night by our youth to raise money for their mission trip this summer and a series based on the book, What Paul Really Said About Women.

My hope and prayer is that this series of Sunday services will make your Lenten season more meaningful. Join us often. Make time for God to speak to you this Lent.