

March 10, 2019
Christ Church, Mexia
1 Lent
Luke 4:1-13

The only way to begin a sermon of the 1st Sunday in Lent is with a joke. I'm sorry if you've heard this one before, but I love it too much.

A state trooper patrolling the interstate noticed a car traveling at a very slow speed, creating a traffic hazard. He flipped on his lights and followed them onto the shoulder of the highway. As he was approaching the car, he realized that the driver was a nun and that the rest of the occupants were as well. Through the window of the car, he inquired, "Sister, is there a problem? Why were you driving so slowly?" She responded, "Why officer, I passed a sign that said the speed limit was 35. I was just obeying the speed limit." "No," he said, "that sign was just the Hwy. Number. You are on Interstate 35. The speed limit is 75." Then he noticed that the rest of the occupants of the car had very wide-eyed terrified looks on their faces, and so he inquired of the driver, "Sister why do your passengers look so frightened?" "Well officer, I think we may have just exited Hwy. 190."

Yes, so okay now, I think we can proceed. So, what have you given up for Lent? Sugary treats in the form of candy and sweet baked goods have become a tempting problem for me, so I'm abstaining from them during Lent. In years past, I've done TV fasts, Facebook fasts, etc., but this year - no candy and no cookies. My mother announced on Wednesday that she was giving up chocolate for Lent. The rest of us are giving thanks that she didn't decide to give up ice cream because I'm not sure we would survive Lent if she had.

Now wouldn't it be nice if candy, chocolate, and ice cream were the temptations we really need to deal with? But we all know that these are just the tune-up for the real temptations in our lives.

Barbara Brown Taylor speaks of Lent as the "Wilderness Test." We each have our own wilderness and our own test. We probably won't find ourselves lost in the desert going through the Son of God test of extra bread, power, and protection.

No, we each have our own. Yours might look like a hospital waiting room. It could look like a motel room after you've been kicked out of your house. Or maybe a parking lot where you can't find your car after you lose your job.

The candy, chocolate and ice cream, she says, are just the pacifiers we use to help us avoid the wilderness. Our own minds are geniuses at telling us that losing our pacifiers is going to kill us, but it's almost never true. All that's going to happen is that we're going to suck air for a while, then we're going to hiccup, then we're going to look around and see things without that pink plastic circle under our noses, which is going to turn out to be a good thing both for us and for everyone else in our lives. Doing without our favorite pacifiers forces us to experience real life fully, without anesthesia.

Without my sugary pacifier, I have to face my wilderness of self-pity, resentments, anger, and impatience. That's just my wilderness and my list. I can't presume to describe your wilderness or the devils that try to tempt you to pick up your favorite pacifier to avoid your real life.

Yes, the devil will try to tell us that without our pacifiers, the wilderness will kill us. But we all know the devil lies. Jesus survived his wilderness test and walked out of the desert filled with the Spirit and free, unburdened and ready to begin his ministry with joy.

Every time you refuse to pick up that pacifier, you are basically telling the devil to go to hell, and after all, that's where all devils belong. And when you've sent them away empty-handed, you, like Jesus, will walk out of the Wilderness filled with the Spirit, free, unburdened, and ready. Do you know how that feels? Sure you do. It's laughing out loud. It's being comfortable in your own skin. It's joy.

There will be other wildernesses and other devils and other temptations. And we will walk through those also. I don't know that it gets easier, but I do think we emerge with more confidence for the next time.

Now, all that said keep in mind that Sundays are always a Feast day of the Lord and not a part of Lent. Therefore I would suggest that we all go have some chocolate ice cream with candy sprinkles after Church. We will be back to the Wilderness soon enough.

Amen.