

## Jesus in the Wilderness

### July 14, 2013

#### Prayer

Almighty God, may your truth and your truth alone be spoken. Amen,

#### Introduction

- Thank-you Shawn, for reading today's scripture, which is the focus of today's sermon.
- As my Sunday School students of the last 17 years will attest, this is one of my all-time favorite scripture readings:
  - It is dramatic:
    - Jesus requires some time to contemplate his ministry on Earth,
    - And he's faced with the Devil, representing sinfulness on Earth.
  - It is direct:
    - Jesus communicates directly with Satan, not through someone afflicted with a demon of a disease, but in a direct conversation
    - This like a battle of the Titans, something that had to be recorded in the Scriptures due to its significance,
- Since he is tempted in the Desert, I think we can assume that Jesus was still working out just what we was going to be doing on Earth, just what his ministry was going to be all about,
- We get a feeling that since Jesus needed to meditate and consider his options, that things had the possibility of going very wrong,
- Think about it, Jesus is the Son of God, but he is also human, which means he understands our aspirations, our weakness, our fears
- Consider for a moment if you had a chance to meet face to face with God, and you were allowed to ask him 3 questions – what would they be?
- If you consider that while reading this story, I think you may discover that anything you can possibly ask are rolled up in these 3 challenges put before Jesus

Let's explore the 3 challenges put before Jesus:

#### The first challenge: Turn these stones into food

- We know this was within Jesus capabilities from what we read in later chapters of the New Testament,
- We also know that Jesus was famished – he hadn't eaten for 40 days!
- So what's the big deal of turning some stones into a little snack?
- I believe it was deeper than that
- Satan was tempting Jesus to found his ministry on serving a man's stomach, rather than his soul,
- How easy it would be to feed people, to lessen their burden on this Earth, by giving them food,
- Surely, this was an option for Jesus new ministry,

- As we all know, if you want to meet your quorum requirements for an Annual Meeting, you make sure you have food,
- “If you feed them, they will come” is a joke that we share over the deviled eggs and the pork and beans,
- But Jesus rejects this option!
- He declares that “Man cannot live on bread alone, but by the Word of God”,
- With that his Ministry begins to take shape.

His second challenge: Jump and have God save you

- Now Jesus is being challenged to use his super, God-like powers,
- He can stand before the masses and perform all sorts of miracles and base his ministry on these,
- He could awe and inspire the world of Humans
- He can build a religion on miracles that defy the laws of physics,
- But Jesus also rejects this approach
- He retorts: “Do not test the Lord your God”
- Now, I know that you’re probably thinking that Jesus does perform miracles in the later chapters of the Scriptures,
- But Jesus did not do those miracles to awe and dazzle, but to instruct us about the fundamental laws of abundance in Love,
- They were teaching tools
- So his Ministry is further defined, that it will not be based on miracles.

His final challenge: Worship me and I’ll give you this World

- Jesus is shown all the World and its Kingdoms,
- How useful would it be for Jesus Ministry if he had absolute authority over the known World,
- He could institute a State Religion,
- He could mandate all to worship God
- This, in fact, was what the Jews of that Age were expecting from the Old Testament Prophets: a Warrior Messiah,
- But Jesus rejects this final offer,
- His Ministry cannot rely on authority to make Humankind worship God,
- Jesus Ministry relies on something else, and here I think is the key:

So, based on Jesus’ choices, what kind of Ministry emerged?

- Jesus Ministry is not based on Food,
- Jesus Ministry is not based on Razzle Dazzle,
- Jesus Ministry is not based on Authority,
- Jesus Ministry is based on *loving God, and your neighbor as yourself*,
- Such a Ministry requires freedom of choice, without bribery, trickery or coercion.

This short passage defines the Ministry that Jesus goes on to define, and that we continue to follow and practice today.

But this Scripture has further relevance for First Congregational Church of East Hartford in the Summer of 2013.

- We are in the process of searching for a new minister
- (I have the privilege of having been voted in a member of the Search Committee)
  
- We are also in the Wilderness
- And we have a rare opportunity to be reflective of our purpose in this community, and how to minister to our members.

So as a conclusion to this sermon, I challenge each of you to consider just what the Church means to you and this town:

- Awhile back, we defined our Church Vision,
- But that was very wordy, and difficult to rally behind,
- This Search process is a chance to simply and clearly define ourselves.
- I personally would suggest these core values:
  - We must follow Jesus Teachings,
  - We must minister to the Spiritual needs of our congregation,
  - And we must serve the needs of the community around us
- I look forward to how we define ourselves as we pass through the Wilderness on our journey.

Thanks be to God.