

## Newsletter Reflection for March

This year the Lenten Season of 40 days began as February ended and will continue for the entire month of March. April opens with Palm Sunday which begins Holy Week; that week that includes both the darkness of Black Friday and the dazzling glory of the Resurrection. During this season we are called to consider those events which in Matthew go back to before Transfiguration glory is seen or the Sermon on the Mount teachings are given; back to the first time a voice from heaven declared Jesus as the Beloved Son at Jesus' baptism and what immediately followed that declaration. Jesus would soon begin his ministry of teaching and healing while calling for repentance just as John the Baptizer was doing. According to Matthew's account immediately after his baptism the Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the "wilderness to be tempted by Satan." Satan represents all those things which are opposed to God's reign...as the Book of Job describes this figure Satan is the "adversary". Mark's account places this experience of Jesus in the same context as Matthew, but recounts that Jesus was driven there immediately by the Spirit for the same purpose: to be tested. We might need to think about the deference between being led and being driven by the Holy Spirit as a part of our Lenten reflections. Throughout Scriptures times spent in the wilderness are always times of testing—testing is whether or not trust in God is present; whether that trust is what governs our choices and lives. Sadly, it seems only Jesus is able to always sustain trust when tested. The tests or temptations as scripture also names them which are described in this encounter are ones we are also given in our lives. They represent situations where we tend to rely on ourselves and our desires to make choices. Jesus has fasted forty days and forty nights before Satan appears. The passage tells us Jesus was famished before he was tested, and that the first test was to offer him food he could make from stones. The test begins with Satan challenging Jesus saying, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." For us this describes how we are tempted to provide something we may need or just desire through choices which depend upon what the world offers. We yearn for things and seek to obtain them for ourselves through things the world displays for us to use like those stones just sitting there in the wilderness. Jesus' response was to quote earlier scriptures which he knew so well they formed the basis of his choices. "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Relying and trusting in God to provide for true needs is important; this does not mean that all those who literally starve from hunger do so because of a lack trust in God because our world is so broken. It does mean guidance is provided in God's Word for us. Trust in God will aid in giving strength and comfort through God's presence with us. Knowing and trusting in God's word to us will help in difficult times when we cannot find answers anywhere else. In Matthew the second test was to test whether or not God would aid and protect Jesus from danger. In this instance Satan has taken him to the top of the temple and asked him to test God's response. Jesus' response came from the Exodus time when he said: "Again it is written to not put your God to the test." Reflecting on this "test", how often do we put ourselves into harm's way through our choices, through actions God's teachings tell us to avoid, then we ask God to intervene and protect us from our

transgressions. How often do we say or hear, "But I didn't realize or know that would happen if?" How often do we act without seeking guidance from God's teachings and then are dismayed by the harm which comes to us or to those we love? The third and last test recorded here is one which seeks to tempt Jesus to seek wealth and power through placing Satan and the things of the world above God's call upon his life. Again Jesus used words foundational to faith from the Torah to reject the idea of worshiping Satan to obtain anything the world could offer: "For it is written 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" The reality of this test in our lives is obvious...the world offers so many bright, glittering things for us to desire, to want so much to possess; to value above God's desire for us to be a community which wants justice and equality to dominate our world instead of seeking to possess some item the world values....Truly reflecting on what God desires for and from us and the ways in which God reaches down and out to us is why the Lenten season can bring us such rewards; rewards through a closer, more intimate relationship with our Lord and with each other.

Have a blessed Lenten journey.

Shalom,

Pastor Libby