

February 18, 2024  
First Sunday of Lent

**Meditation:** “Tried, Tested, and .....

The Pope and the Jews in Rome (*joke*)

We all have our wilderness moments, our times in the wastelands, and we all face tests of one kind or another, don't we? Sometimes it's just us, alone in the time of trial. I remember a colleague at IBM who was tested. He told me that just a few weeks after completing his CPR training a co-worker suffered a heart attack. His heart stopped beating altogether and this colleague, knowing CPR, started performing it right away. When the paramedics arrived, they asked if he was okay to continue performing CPR and had him continue, even in the ambulance, all the way to the hospital.

One of the tests I faced was at the time of my graduation from Emmanuel College. My Presbytery E&S committee wasn't ready to recommend me for ordination. The first year was tough, but at least the committee had some things they wanted me to work on, so I did them. The next year, having completed all that they asked, they again were not prepared to recommend me for ordination. That was a very difficult time for me. It was at that time that I began working with the homeless of Toronto.

The Greek work that has been translated as 'tempted' in the New Testament would have been more accurately translated as 'tested'. Jesus went through a time of testing in the wilderness. First, he was baptized by John in the Jordan. Then, as he came up from below the surface of the water, like someone rising from the dead, he received the Holy Spirit, as it descended on him like a dove. Then he heard a voice say, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Then the Spirit drove him into the wilderness with the wild beasts, and

there he was tested. But Jesus was not alone in the wilderness with the wild beasts. God also sent angels, literally messengers of God, to wait on or watch over him.

Other times, it is us, as a group that is being tested. It could be a country, like USA, struggling with two very different views of what the country should look like, how the country should run, perhaps if it should even continue to be a democracy. Or it could be a community, faced with a major loss, like the destruction of its business district by some disaster of some kind. Or it could be a congregation, faced with the loss of a matriarch, or the loss of their building.

What is the trial in your life at this time? Is it individual, or is it communal?

My colleague at IBM was not alone in administering CPR. He had angels, sent by God, watching over him. Two of those angels were paramedics. Indeed, in another sense, my colleague was himself an angel, sent to watch over his co-worker, who was brought back to life by the CPR he performed. To the best of my knowledge, he is alive still.

In my time of testing, an angel was sent to me. His name was Gerald Sheppard. He was the professor of the Old Testament at Emmanuel College. He and I met at an alumni event and he asked what I was doing. I informed him that my E&S committee had not yet recommended me for ordination, so I was currently working as a street outreach worker with Toronto's homeless. What he said to me next was the breakthrough I needed. "What a wonderful ministry. I myself once worked with the homeless in San Francisco." Those words of acknowledgement and recognition were also words of

encouragement to me, and that fall I was recommended for ordination. In another very real sense, I too was an angel, sent by God, to Toronto's homeless.

And so it is with each of us, in our times of testing. We are never truly alone in the time of trial, for we never pass out of God's notice. God is with each and every one of us in our wilderness moments. God sends angels to wait on us, to watch over us, to support us, and to encourage us in our times of testing. Thanks be to God.