

Sunday March 9, 2025
First Sunday of Lent

Meditation: “Rooted in what?”

I’m not sure if it’s the lengthening days or the weather forecast for this coming week, but Barbara and I can hardly wait for July and time away on Manitoulin Island. We can hardly wait to hike the Cup and Saucer trail or around Misery Bay, listen to the birds singing first thing in the morning or riding our bikes into town for lunch, visiting an art gallery or kayaking around Treasure Island in the middle of Lake Mindemoya. By now, you’ve figured out that when Barbara and I head off into the wilderness we don’t go alone or unprepared. We have our trailer to sleep in, a camp stove to cook on, a cooler to keep our food fresh, bikes to ride, kayaks to paddle, and a hammock to nap in.

Unlike us, when Jesus headed into the wilderness he went alone and took nothing with him. And he didn’t just go for three weeks, like we do, he was led into the wilderness by the Spirit for 40 days, suggestive of the 40 years that the Israelites spend in the wilderness travelling from Egypt to the land of milk and honey. After 40 days without anything to eat, you can well imagine that he was famished. And that is precisely when Satan, the deceiver, started trying to trick Jesus.

Barbara and I take other things with us when we travel. One of those things is garbage bags. I know, sounds glamorous, doesn’t it? We take them because we have things like egg shells, potato peelings, and coffee grinds to dispose of. We take them because we have consideration for those who follow behind us and don’t want to camp on a site where others have spread food waste around. We take them because we have consideration not just for other people, but for God’s beautiful creation. If we see trash on a hike, we usually pick it up and take it to a waste receptacle, or back to the campsite to our own garbage bag. The privilege of enjoying the great outdoors is not all about us, but about God’s creation.

The first challenge the devil made was to have Jesus turn stones into loaves of bread. After 40 days without eating, I'm sure Jesus would have liked a nice thick sandwich. Jesus was on to the devil's tricks right away. What the devil was asking was for Jesus to use his power for his own needs and desires, for his own self-gratification. But Jesus knew that life wasn't all about him, but about all of God's creatures and creation. It's too bad that so many in our society, even the leader of the free world, think that life is all about them; that the whole earth revolves around them.

When Barbara and I watch the red polls, or listen to the veery thrush in the forest, or gaze out from the escarpment on the Cup and Saucer trail, or look at the sand cranes, or enjoy the waves lapping at the shore, or watch the sun set over the lake we marvel at the beauty of God's creation, and we leave the place reluctantly at the end of our stay.

When the devil placed Jesus on the pinnacle of the temple, and Jesus gazed out over the whole of Jerusalem and the countryside for miles around, the devil said, throw yourself from the top of the temple, for God's angels are waiting to protect you from so much as scraping your foot on a stone. The devil was trying to tempt Jesus not just to test God's protection, but to step off and away from the temple, the very centre of the Jewish faith. The devil was trying to tempt Jesus to step away from his faith. Many in our society place their faith in things other than God.

We also have a camp stove, which means that we take naptha gas. I know, we should perhaps get with the twenty-first century and take an air fryer or an induction burner, but we don't. There's nothing like that first cup of coffee, perked on the Coleman stove on a chilly morning. Part of using naptha is that you have to be very careful. You can't refill the tank when the stove is hot. You have to make sure that you don't spill any, or have any residue of gas in

the body of the stove when you light it. Use of the Coleman stove requires that we use it carefully and wisely.

The devil put Jesus on a high place, such that Jesus could see the whole world around him. And then the devil told Jesus that all that he could see would be his if only Jesus would worship him. The devil was holding out the promise of fame and power and wealth. Sounds like the things that many in our society chase after: more followers and more likes on social media; power over the lives of millions, the power to tear down, the power to destroy, the power to control others, the power to control the narrative; and money, always more money, because you can never have too much, even if you are the richest man on the planet. The temptation here was for Jesus to turn his back on God, and to worship false idols.

Ultimately, the devil wanted Jesus to use his power for his own gratification, to turn his back on God and make himself the centre of everything, and to step away from his faith; “nothing bad will happen.” He wanted Jesus to deny the things that kept him rooted. But Jesus knew that power has to be used carefully and wisely. With great power, comes great responsibility – responsibility to and for others. Power is best used when it is used for the benefit of all, for life is not about us as individuals. Life is found in community – community with one another and with God. Stepping away from our faith, from the very thing that keeps us rooted in humility, in grace, in compassion, in respect, in truth, in justice, in love and in joy; stepping away from all of that is foolishness, for those are the very things that give our lives purpose and meaning.

Without those things, what are we rooted in?