“Claimed not Captured”

Rev. Debra McGuire

Bethany Presbyterian Church

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Luke 4:1-13

March 9, 2025 – Lent 1

***Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16***

***You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,  
2will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.”***

***Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place,  
10no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.***

***11For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.  
12On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.  
13You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.***

***14Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name.  
15When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble; I will rescue them and honor them.  
16With long life I will satisfy them and show them my salvation.***

***Luke 4:1-13***

***Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2where for forty days he was tested by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over he was famished. 3The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” 4Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’ ”***

***5Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6And the devil said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. 7If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” 8Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’ ”***

***9Then the devil led him to Jerusalem and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ 11and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’ ”***

***12Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ” 13When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.***

Martin Luther, the reluctant father of the Protestant Reformation, used to feel tormented by not feeling good enough to please God. Supposedly, while reading Paul’s words in the letter to the Romans, Luther realized that “God’s love and blessing was not dependent on his ability to follow rules, but solely on God’s decision to choose and save him.”5 From that Luther had this unique strategy during his turbulent life, to face down all of his doubts and persecutors. He would stand up and yell, “I am baptized!” He did this to remind himself that his connection to Christ was unbreakable.

I can imagine Jesus out in the wilderness thinking to himself, “Why didn’t I think of that?”

This first Sunday of the liturgical season of Lent always begins with this story of Jesus’ time in the wilderness, being tested by the devil. In Luke’s gospel, Jesus has just been claimed by God in his baptism and is immediately led by the Spirit into the wilderness. Just like Luther, just like Jesus, being claimed by God in baptism did not *prevent* troubles and bring with it certain happiness and success, despite promises such as the portions, of Psalm 91 that we read today.

The placement of today’s text at the beginning of Lent is to remind us that we too have been claimed by God in our baptism. While we cannot claim to face better prospects than anyone else, we can be absolutely certain that nothing will ever separate us from God. Today’s reading reminds us that Lent is not a time to *prove* that we are God’s. Rather, Lent then is a time for us to declare what being a child of God means to us in our lives.

Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness where the Spirit remained with him for 40 days and 40 nights. The Spirit did not lead Jesus to a place where then the Spirit left him alone. Jesus was not dropped off at the curb and asked to call when he was ready to come home. For those 40 days Jesus was tested the entire time by the devil. The three scenarios given to Jesus by the devil were certainly not the only temptations presented to Jesus. When the 40 days were coming to an end, Jesus was famished because he had not eaten. Had Jesus performed like a circus monkey and magically changed the stone into bread, his biological need for sustenance would be taken care of. What’s not to like? Jesus however, recalled the words of Moses during the Israelites’ 40 years in exile saying “Man does not live by bread alone.” *Alone*. Yes, we need our biological sustenance and strength, but the temptation to provide food for just one person in one moment was not what being God’s Son was about. The second temptation the devil offered was one that would give Jesus all the power and glory of all of the kingdoms of the world if Jesus would bow down and worship the devil. Again, words from Moses were Jesus’ reply. “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”

While all three of these temptations are written in all three of the synoptic gospels, once again Luke has provided a little spin of his own in order to make a theological statement. In the gospels of Matthew and Mark, this third temptation comes second. Here in Luke, the final temptation relates to Jesus’ physical safety. If Jesus would throw himself off of this rock and rely on the very protections from today’s psalm, he could save himself from harm and death. This temptation is last in order to underscore that Jesus physical being was not protected because the very mission of being God’s Son meant that he would die. It is that death toward which we are headed in this season of Lent.

For the devil, each individual temptation was a chance for Jesus to prove that he was the Son of God. “If….you are the Son of God..” For the devil the time in the wilderness was a time of facts.

For Jesus, all of the temptations were a test. Jesus knew he was the Son of God. Jesus didn’t need to prove anything. For Jesus, a better translation would be “Since…I am the Son of God…” Jesus’ time in the wilderness was a time to show his identity.

Lent is not a time for us to avoid chocolate, wine, show our suffering in order to *prove* that we are children of God. Lent is a time to *declare* with our actions and choices, that we are children of God. In order to do that we need to know what we believe, to know what matters to us and how our faith directs our values, we need to take care of ourselves. As individuals this might look differently from one person to the next.

At our Ash Wednesday service this week, I passed out my own version of a Lenten calendar. Much like an Advent calendar with the little boxes that open each day, my Lenten calendar has a box for each day. Instead of getting a reward or piece of chocolate or toy celebrating the coming Christ in Advent, my Lenten calendar offers space to do the thing that helps you get closer to Christ. I think sometimes Lent is a season and sometimes Lent is a way of life. For these next 40 days, I invite us to eat chocolate, eat the cake, drink the wine because forgoing a small pleasure is not the same as recognizing the power of being a child of God. Forgoing a small pleasure is not the same as joining in the suffering of Christ as he headed toward the cross. But, finding a way to live in a way that appreciates our own mortality and suffering just as Christ did. We are dust and to dust we will return. We are love and to love we will return. We are God’s and to God we will return.

And until then, we have an opportunity with discipline and discernment, to determine and strengthen our identity as children of God.

Let’s pray,

1<https://cepreaching.org/commentary/2025-03-03/psalm-911-2-9-16-2/>

Hoeze, Scott, March 2025

2 <https://cepreaching.org/commentary/2025-03-03/luke-41-13-4/>

Harmon, Chelsey, March 2025

3<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/first-sunday-in-lent-3/commentary-on-luke-41-13-6>

Swanson, Richard W., March 2025

4<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/first-sunday-in-lent-3/commentary-on-psalm-911-2-9-16-6>

Benckhuysen, Amanda, March 2025

5<http://www.gracepritchardburson.net/2021/01/12/i-am-baptized/>