

Sermon Draft

Text: Luke 4:1–13

Sermon: In Our Wilderness

First Christmas, then Epiphany, now Lent, soon Easter. All about sin. This place, this Christian Church, is here for one reason for God to expose and remove our sin. That's the business of the Church. That's why we're here or should be. The purpose of Lent, of Christ, of the Church is to take away our sin. God's forgiveness, acting, doing everything because of sin. Christ is with us in our wilderness.

Unfortunately, we can easily forget that the wages of sin is death and if we don't think our sin is so serious and deadly, then we feel we don't really need the Church; we don't need Christ.

What good is a bloody Savior no one needs? So, we end up going through the motions of religion. After all, nothing really happens here that interests us. For some Church is a social club or charitable organization where we can do "nice things" for others who are in need.

The idea is that we're all fine and good and squared away. It's the other people who need our deliverance. Well, true all people need deliverance and we all as neighbors need mercy and charity.

If we ever lose sight that we, you and I **are** "poor miserable sinners" then of all the people in the world we are in danger of being the most guilty, the most sinful, the most unclean and our sin (whether it's secret or out in the open) drives us out of heaven and into hell forever. And hell is a real, bitter place of total isolation, misery, a place where we will never be separated from what terrorizes us, never.

If we ever lose sight that we and all the world need deliverance from our sin, our children, our co-workers and friends, our neighbors known and unknown need deliverance from their sin. If we ever lose sight of this fact, then the Church has lost its purpose. God put this Church here, in this city, this very place, for each of us, so he can remove our sin. That's why he is here now.

So, as a pastor, as your pastor if I am to speak truthfully I must stand before all people who have come here today and announce what is true about each of us. That sin has infected us with death. We can't escape it. It's festering in our deepest parts, working all the way down and all the way through.

Of course, the world, and even we Christians sometimes defend ourselves, say we're mostly "good" deep down. But, if that is what we believe then we don't understand sin at all. Sin rots us. It decays, it perverts what it touches, and it touches each of us.

Proof? Ever been sick? Mistreated someone, friend or enemy (enemies are easier to mistreat!)? What grudge are you still holding, even here in this place? Have you ever been rejected and even once known tears? Suffered an accident? These things are **not** God's judgment on us for specific sins, but they are signs of the sin that is on all people, all creation, on each of us. These things cannot happen to sinless people in a pure, sinless world. It's all residue of sin.

I can prove you touched a hot stove by looking at your burnt fingers. I can show you your sin by showing you your pain, your weakness, your anger, and your bitterness in this world. And you can see my sin in the same way.

If our marriage is perfect, our children are perfect, health is perfect, house is perfect, school is perfect, if nothing breaks down, nothing disappoints, if nothing hurts, if everything is “milk and honey,” then relax. You’re safe sin has not polluted you. You will live forever, even without Christ, apparently.

But if your life is not perfect, your health not perfect, your family not perfect, you have worries and doubts then something deadly is causing it. And it’s not God. God doesn’t break things for a hoot. God is peace and not chaos around us. Love not hate. Life not death in us. If chaos and hatred and sickness and suspicion and death have invaded our lives and family, then we ought best to recognize it. It is this: **Sin**, sin has corrupted us. We are “ruined” by it and condemned by it.

It's a "wilderness" (a wasteland) out there, and we are lost in it, forever. But "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness."

Look beside you there in your wilderness, your desert. There is Jesus. Going through the same trials as us and more. stalked and hunted by Satan seeking whom he may devour. This is Jesus on his way to the cross and death!

Why is Jesus here? He has never sinned. His body flesh and bone and heart and soul are pure and holy. Why is he in this barren place hungry, tempted, suffering like this? Because we are here.

Jesus could not stay in heaven's peace and glory while we are here suffering. If we lose all things, he loses all things. If we starve and sweat and squirm, he, too, must starve and sweat and squirm. If we suffer condemnation, he suffers condemnation. If we are to die, he must die too. He loves us too much to leave us here in sin's desert, this world even with its bright excitements and occasional splendor and excellent advertising, all at Satan's tempting disposal.

While *“this world’s prince may still Scowl fierce as he will,”* Jesus is *“by our side upon the plain”* where we are and where the fight is. And Jesus will do the fight himself, hang on a tree, rise from the dead, ascend! he *“holds the field forever”* (LSB 656:3, 4, 2).

Something more is happening here: wherever Jesus walks in this desert, new life springs up. Your life and mine. Life from heaven, from God to us. Like a leafy green tree heavy with fruit in the middle of a desert where we wouldn’t expect it. A tree of life to eat from, and so to eat and get life after the Garden of Eden tree is long gone. And he is a spring of life-giving water, bubbling up in the middle of our desert shouting out defiantly against Satan and his carefully cultivated drought that is all around us. Jesus shouts his Word: “Forgiven!”

Jesus suffers. Jesus starves. Jesus wanders in this bitter forty-day wilderness for one reason: you are here. But he’s not here to empathize with us just to say how bad it is. He’s here to re-create us, to reconcile us so we can go to heaven to be with our heavenly Father. That’s why the Holy Spirit led him to us, to the desert.

So He can bring life down from heaven to this spot in the desert, our desert. He brings food down from heaven, healing for our hurt minds and bodies, our aching hearts, our bruised souls. God created us but sin wrecks us and death wants to claim us. But Christ came to rescue and heals us, to forgive us and create us anew.

His water is the only water in the wilderness that will save us. So, he says, “I baptize you with it . . . in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

And his food is the only food that will nourish us “to life everlasting,” so “Take and eat, this is my body . . . given . . . for you. And my blood shed . . . for you . . . forgiveness.” Here is life from heaven in this wilderness. Here is deliverance from Satan “*and all his works and all his ways.*” Here is cleansing from our sin!

This is why God is in the desert, why Christ is with us in our wilderness. Why his Body, the Church, is here. Why we are here at this moment. This life, this deliverance, this cleansing is ours.

The sin that is ours that has claimed us, that has brought us death and destruction has been taken away in Christ who has come into our wilderness and claimed us as His own.

Amen