



3050 Rosemont Blvd.
Montreal, QC H1Y 1M2
(514) 721-1830

welcome@trinityuc.net
www.trinityuc.net

Anjou UNITED CHURCH

7951 Place Dade
Montreal, QC H1K 1R4
(514) 352-7790

www.facebook.com/AnjouUC

**“Wrestling Your Demons”
Trinity-Anjou Pastoral Charge
Sunday, March 5, 2017**

Read Sherman

Scriptures: Matthew 4:1-11; Video "40" - a cartoonist's depiction of Jesus' 40 day fast

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-6a25Yo2wE>

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be a witness, O God, to your Way of love, justice and faithful walking with us. Amen.

The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness. To be tempted. By the devil. Well, woah! Let's hold on here just a moment. Why would God's spirit want to propel Jesus into a desert, where it's blazing hot during the day, cold at night, no comforts, no food. And why would Jesus be willing to go? We have to assume it was his choice to fast for what Matthew says was 40 days and 40 nights, which in Bible-speak means for a very very long time.

Well, let's see if we can unpack this a bit. Just before this story, Matthew places the story of Jesus being baptized, so there has to be a connection here, don't you think? Jesus in one moment is being praised by God in the heavens "This is my son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." (vs. 17) The next, the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness to be tested, tempted. Maybe it's like Jesus has just passed one test, an entry exam if you will, by being baptized by John in the Jordan River. He's on a path "to fulfill all righteousness" as Matthew's Jesus puts it. Being baptized – that visible expression of God's invisible grace – inaugurates Jesus' mission and ministry. It is only then that Jesus can get to work on God's behalf and that much makes sense. Working for God and God's coming realm is at heart a turning of ordinary everyday living into sacramental living – making the invisible reality of God's constant presence and care for us visible by how we live, how we treat others, how we care for the world. God's grace and love for everyone is the message, full stop. But like all of us who apply for a new job, we have to prepare ourselves to do our job well, maybe even to impress the boss. Nowadays employers usually stick new trainees in front of a monitor and make you watch a video about the company and its expectations in your new role. In Jesus' case, for a job that has a lot riding on it, the preparation is much, much more.

40 days of fasting, in fact. 40 days of being alone with no one but himself and God for company. 40 days let's say to wrestle with his demons. By referring to Jesus in this way, I know I'm turning the story around a little bit. Matthew would have us focus on that bad actor the devil, putting temptations in Jesus' way. The thing is here, temptations are only temptations when we're tempted by them aren't they? So we can say these were Jesus' temptations – to use the power of God within him to conjure bread from stones, to test God's ability to protect him from a great fall and all harm, or to claim a kingdom for his own use and ego, rather than proclaim a kingdom that is God's and open to everyone.

Could it be that Jesus willingly goes into the wilderness because he knows he has these temptations inside of him? He knows he needs to wrestle with them, to purge himself in order to serve God faithfully by living an extraordinarily selfless life. Our story tells us he is successful at facing down his temptations and sending that bad actor devil away. What a relief for him, and for us. You see if Jesus could prove himself stronger than his temptations, then that can give us courage when we find ourselves ensnared by a temptation – let's call it a bad habit of either thinking or acting. We can be free ourselves from anything that prevents us from living from that place of sacramental grace revealed to Jesus at his baptism, and to us by ours.

Now that is good news, but what is best about this story is that Jesus really is never alone in his wilderness wrestling. Remember that it was the Holy Spirit that led him into this process in the first place? Surely God does not leave him alone. God allows Jesus to do what he needs to do to get out from under the temptations that threaten to wreck his life and mission. In his fasting and deprivation of comfort, Jesus takes away all the distractions that prevent him from looking deeply into his own imperfect human nature. Jesus is free to take on such suffering, but God will not leave him alone in it. Our cartoonist hints at this when we see two angels looking into Jesus' cave, watching over him. Matthew makes it explicit when suddenly angels come at the end of his ordeal and wait upon him.

Whether we are baptized or not, God gives us the Spirit we need to wrestle with our demons and win too. Whatever our struggles or temptations may be, if we take time out to be with God, to take a holiday from ourselves, if you will, to let God's spirit in Christ propel us to new insight and new action, it may just be we can confront our problems and overcome them, and not by our own power or actions alone. People in Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous, Sex Addicts Anonymous, Gambling Anonymous and the like will know you can't get clean and sober without a higher power, without angels, sponsors, family and friends that will stick by you no matter what.

Jesus was alone in the wilderness a long time, but in faith he was truly never alone. He had the words of Torah with him, and the promises of God that invited him to pass a test of readiness that he might channel God's love in a way we've never quite seen the like of since. I wonder if he dreamed of angels, out there facing down all his demons? Maybe in the eagles that soared high above him, wings outstretched in fierce majesty, he remembered the words of psalm 91 that speak of God's leading spirit and constant care. We're going to sing those words now, and may they buoy you up for the journey of this Lenten season and in all the places of struggle you may know. Christ has walked that way before us, blazing a trail. To walk with him, we need only to begin. Amen.