

Sermon Milk and Honey and Ashes - Luke 4:1-13**Scriptures** Luke 4:1-13

Pause

We're really good at wishing/praying good things for each other. We pray blessings on each other – here at church aloud or privately before God. We pray that God's presence will surround, heal, nurture, convict and abide with us – but rarely do we pray that God will remind us of our finiteness...

Rarely do we pray that we will be confronted by our own weakness. Rarely do we pray that one whom we love dearly will be struck by their finiteness and I know that very rarely do we pray that we ourselves would be confounded by our sins...and yet...

We don't want to be reminded that we've sinned. We don't want to be reminded that there are things in our lives that we choose to ignore – for the sake of looking good.

I'm of the mindset that God is a God of grace and love and commitment – that God seeks us – and desires to abide with us. I also believe that once we have committed to faith and belief in the love of Jesus Christ, God's son, we are saved.

Our Mennonite Confession of Faith speaks of Salvation much better than I can. We read, "When we hear the good news of the love of God, the Holy Spirit moves us to accept the gift of salvation. God brings us into right relationship without coercion.

Now, some of you may think that that's it. Final. All done. And yes, we are saved through faith and God's grace. But that is not the end – Jesus reminds us in the parable of the sheep and the goats that worship without service means nothing. James 2:26 reminds us that faith alone – without works is dead and in 1 Corinthians 13:2 Paul reminds us that if we faith without love then we are nothing.

You see, we cannot pick up – accept, receive God's grace until we let go of the stuff we hold. The Confession of Faith continues: "Our response to God includes yielding to God's grace, placing full trust in God alone, repenting of sin, turning from evil, joining the fellowship of the redeemed, and showing forth the obedience of faith in word and deed (Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, *Article 8. salvation*).

This is the first Sunday of a season called Lent. While the celebration of Lent isn't found or even prescribed in the Bible, the Jewish people – Jesus included - did celebrate a season of repentance that began at the time of the New Year (Rosh

Hashanah) and then concluded after 10 days with Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement.

Yom Kippur is considered the date on which Moses received the second set of Ten Commandments. It occurred following the completion of the second 40 days of instructions from God. At this same time the Israelites were granted atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf; hence, its designation as the Day of Atonement.

The point of this time of repentance is to atone for one's sins and become reconciled with God. These are not easy days. There is much fasting, prayer, and almsgiving.

As Christians, we do set aside these 40 days of Lent for intentional repentance, confession, restlessness, and temptation. It is a time for preparing our hearts to receive the resurrected Christ. It is a time of preparation for reconciliation.

We have 40 long days to think about this. Forty long days when we're reminded to repent. Forty days of slogging through temptation, sin and self-recriminations.

Is **that** what Lent is all about?

Barb read for us part of Moses' story. God gave the Israelites a land flowing with milk and honey. And they, in turn gave genuine gratitude through their offering of their first fruits.

Those 40 years of wandering the wilderness from Egypt to Canaan tested the mettle of God's people. These 40 days of Lent are a bit of a wilderness. Like the Hebrews wandering in the wilderness – and like we – in these days, Jesus too was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days.

The gospels remind us that Jesus, in a time of preparation for ministry, set out to be alone – to focus on his priorities, to pray to fast, to open himself up to God's working in him. And I am so thankful that the gospels include this story of Jesus' temptations because it reminds us that God knows our frailty – intimately – and loves us beyond it.

We read: **Luke 4:1-13**

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

Rev. Dr. Susanna Metz, in her article, "Sin, like ashes in our eyes" questions, "Would it have been so wrong if Jesus just turned a few stones to bread? Certainly, there's no sin in that. What is Luke really telling us? Perhaps, that we might be tempted to want to manipulate the world to our liking. *That* can grow into the serious sin of not caring where our food comes from, or the environment from which it grew.

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

Jesus' second temptation might make us think about what we feel we must own. What in our lifestyles comes before our consideration of God? If we're honest, many things can draw our eyes away from God – things that, in and of themselves, are not bad. But things can own us – and power can own us – and we lose who we are when we become slaves to our stuff and our power (Metz *Sin, like ashes in our eyes, lent 1 (c) - 2013*).

⁹ *Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here,"* ¹⁰ *for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,'* ¹¹ *and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"* ¹² *Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"* ¹³ *When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.*

Jesus Christ knows what we face. Christ is very familiar with the powers that try to turn our hearts from God. This time of Lent is a time for us to face, acknowledge our sins, repent and ask for forgiveness and then let go; to open our hands and give to God all the fear, the hate, the entitlement – all the sin that holds us back so that we can have open and empty hands and hearts that are ready to be filled with God's grace. So full that the grace and love cannot help but spill out in everything we do.

Friends, in these days of repentance, do not be afraid. Whatever comes up in your times of self-examination, know that God has never and will never abandon us. God is with us – loves us – and is always ready to lead us through the stark wilderness to the feast beyond. We, too, have been promised a land flowing with milk and honey where God will wipe away the ash of our shame and cloth us with love.

Amen