

Luke 4:1-13

March 6, 2022 Lent 1

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

At Bibles and Brews a couple of weeks ago we were talking about the poem - Footprints in the Sand by Mary Stevenson.

You may be familiar with it. It's the one with the person questioning Jesus why there was only one set of footprints in the sand during the most difficult times of her life, while during the good times there were two sets.

She thinks that the one set of prints is when Jesus had abandoned her, that's why the times were so dark, but Jesus says – No, that's when I carried you.

Mary Stevenson wrote that poem in 1936 when she was only 14 years old. She wrote it to give to people when they were feeling bad. She wanted them to know that Jesus was with them and to not be discouraged.

The lessons we have for today are swimming in the back of this poem, whether Mary realized it or not.

In Deuteronomy, we hear how the Israelites are brought from slavery to freedom by God.

In the Psalm 91:14-16 we get an oracle that was used over and over again for those who were in trouble – I will deliver those who cling to me; I will uphold them, because they know my name. They will call me, and I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble; I will rescue and honor them. With long life will I satisfy them and show them my salvation.

In Romans, Paul reminds us that, “No one who believes in Jesus will be put to shame. For, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

And then we have Jesus in the wilderness being tested by the devil.

The devil wanted to know who Jesus really is. The devil wanted to know what he was up against, and he comes to find out that Jesus will not turn from God's will.

There is nothing that will pull Jesus away from his mission to bring healing and salvation to the world.

A lot of times people get confused about today's Gospel text and they think it's an example of what they have to do to be saved, but that's not the point at all. This text in the wilderness is for our reassurance that Jesus is our Savior, that he will go to the mat for us and be victorious.

Today's Gospel reading follows Jesus' baptism. After he is baptized and while praying, the Spirit leads him out into the wilderness where he is tested for 40 days.

Often people wonder why Jesus was baptized by John when Jesus is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. The answer is that in his baptism, Jesus joins us in our own baptismal waters. He becomes one with us, so that he can be our Savior.

You can't pull a drowning person out of the water unless you jump in with them, and that's exactly what Jesus does, and so it is not until after his baptism that Jesus goes off to confront the one who challenges us every day – the devil – the one who wants us to think that we can be God – note the Garden of Eden. The devil is constantly tempting us to believe that we can be self-sufficient without God. The devil is constantly trying to get us break the first commandment – to break our relationship with God.

So, if Jesus had given in to the devil in the wilderness, there is no way he could be our Savior, because he would be just like us, but we need a Savior. We need someone stronger than us who can pull us out of the muck. We can't be saved by someone who gives into the devil's lies. And so God comes for us.

This story is put here for us. This action of Jesus is for us. It's always for us. Everything Jesus does is for us. Jesus already knows who he is, but we need the reassurance.

So, this story is not about what we do, but what Jesus is doing for us, saving us and healing us, constantly pulling us out of the mud so that we can swim.

And so, after his testing and by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus returns to his community in Galilee, even stronger in his mission for us. He knows what we are up against and he will not let the devil win. We are God's children after all, completely and fully loved by God, and as Jesus proves in his death and resurrection, there is absolutely nothing God won't do for us.

As Mary Stevenson pointed out in her poem, when we are in our darkest hours being tempted by the devil, feeling separated from God, Jesus is there carrying us through. Even if we give into temptation, Jesus picks us up and carries us on to the other side.

In baptism, we pass through the waters of death into resurrection with Jesus. In the waters of baptism, we pass from slavery into freedom.

So, don't ever give up. You are never alone. Jesus is our strength when we are weak. There is no one nor anything stronger than Jesus Christ our Lord, Savior, and Healer, to whom we are eternally connected in baptism, and by the Holy Spirit.

During Lent we remember our connectedness to God and work to grow closer to God so that we are strengthened to be Christ's presence in the world. By acknowledging our weakness, and our need for a Savior, we are actually the strongest we can be.

Contrary to what some people think, the 40 days of Lent are not about us being tempted by the devil. Eating a bar of chocolate or drinking that coffee you gave up for Lent is not meant to be a workout regimen to get us in fighting shape to go head to head with the devil when bigger issues arise.

The 40 days of Lent actually tie in with the Exodus from slavery into the Promised Land.

When Jesus refuses to turn stones into bread, he is not being like the Israelites who complained in the wilderness about manna and begged for real food. Jesus is not a regular person.

When Jesus absolutely refuses to worship the devil, he is the opposite of all the Kings of Israel and Judah who turned away from God to idol worship. He is not like kings of old.

When he refuses to jump off the pinnacle of the temple, we see that he will not test God, only the devil does test. Jesus will only follow God's will, and no one else's. Jesus already knows God's love, so why would he need to test it. Jesus is totally secure in who he is, so there is no way he will turn from doing what he has come to do in the world.

Jesus is on a mission from God for our salvation and our healing. As we head to the cross, that's our good news. Nothing is going to keep Jesus from getting the job done, because we are loved dearly.

The truth is that we are weak. We need a Savior. As the song goes, we are weak, but he is strong. Jesus is strong, and knowing that we are weak, he carries us from the slavery of sin and death into the freedom of unconditional love and eternal life where we are forever secure in God's love for us.

We are on the road to Easter, and Jesus is walking wet with us, dripping with the same water of Baptism, through life, death, and into resurrection, so that we have nothing to fear.

Mary Stevenson wrote "Footprints in the Sand" to bring hope to the people whom she met who were distraught, who thought they were abandoned by God, because things were so bad.

The temptation in the wilderness was written down for us so that we would never forget that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior, the Healer, the one and only Son of God who has come for us, to eternally unite us with God. To make us secure in God's love. Without these words, Mary Stevenson could never have written her own words of hope.

When we are weak, he is strong. Where we would give in, Jesus refuses to.

God is on our side, by our side, and eternally carrying us to the other side. Jesus Christ is our Lord, Savior, Strengthener, and Security Guard.

Thanks be to God. Amen.