

**"SLOWING DOWN"**  
**LUKE 4:1-13**  
**JANUARY 27, 2019**

When we think of Jesus' time in the wilderness, we think of his showdown there with the devil. We think of Jesus denying himself food and drink; we imagine a difficult and lonely time, a trial of both patience and faith. But if we look closer, we also see this wilderness time as an opportunity for discernment, clarification, and prayer. It is from the wilderness experience that Jesus gets his energy and direction that he will need over the course of his difficult next three years. Consider what the Spirit is saying to the church in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke, beginning at the first verse:

*Now Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wild. For forty wilderness days and nights he was tested by the Devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when the time was up, he was hungry.*

*The Devil, playing on his hunger, gave the first test: "Since you're God's Son, command this stone to turn into a loaf of bread."*

*Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy: "It takes more than bread to really live."*

*For the second test he led him up and spread out all the kingdoms of the earth on display at once. Then the Devil said, "They're yours in all their splendor to serve your pleasure. I'm in charge of them all and can turn them over to whomever I wish. Worship me and they're yours, the whole works."*

*Jesus refused, again backing his refusal with Deuteronomy: "Worship the Lord your God and only the Lord your God. Serve him with absolute single-heartedness."*

*For the third test the Devil took him to Jerusalem and put him on top of the Temple. He said, "If you are God's Son, jump. It's written, isn't it, that*

*'he has placed you in the care of angels to protect you; they will catch you; you won't so much as stub your toe on a stone?'*"

*"Yes," said Jesus, "and it's also written, 'Don't you dare tempt the Lord your God.'"*

*That completed the testing. The Devil retreated temporarily, lying in wait for another opportunity.*

Here ends the lesson. May God bless these words as we seek to apply them to our lives.

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I was stopped for speeding a couple of weeks ago. Yes, I was! I haven't had a driving ticket in nearly 25 years, but my perfect record now has a big fat blemish on it. I was driving in the wilderness out on Russellville Road, returning from a Committee on Ministry meeting in the Springs that morning.

Nobody is *ever* on Russellville Road. That's why I love to drive it. I ride along through the bucolic countryside, past the beekeeper's hives, the three signs and entrances for the small Deerfield community, the few houses tucked way back off the road, and the many ranches that dot the landscape. Eventually, the road leads back to Hwy 83. Nobody is *ever* on Russellville Road with me, did I mention that?

Well there I was, tooling along with my mind on other things, anxious to get back to the church office and get to work. I had a sermon to write, a class to prepare, the bulletin to review, and a blurb to write for the Thursday email. Lots of important "stuff" awaited me. I passed by a black

truck stopped at the mailbox leading up to a house. I think I waved to the driver and I continued on my merry way.

How interesting, how rare! I thought. There's *actually* someone else out here on the road with me! I glanced back in my rearview mirror and noticed him turning around to follow me. Instinctively, I slowed down, as we all do when we pass by what might be, just might be, yep, there he was now turning on his blue and red flashing lights as he came up behind me.

"Golly gee willickers!" I said out loud to myself, or something close to those words, I don't quite remember them. I pulled over and stopped, fished out my driver's license and opened up my glove box, preparing for my encounter with the lawman.

"Good morning, Officer," I said sheepishly, and handed him my license. He looked it over and then he greeted me professionally. "Good morning, ma'am. I clocked you going 18 miles an hour over the speed limit back there half a mile. Is there a particular reason why you are in a hurry today?"

What could I say?

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I imagine Jesus out in his wilderness time having a similar conversation with himself. Luke writes about an encounter Jesus has with the devil, but I have those conversations all the time as do you, and we all know the devil lives in our head.

"What brings you out into these forsaken parts of the wilderness, Pard?" he asks. "Is there a particular reason that you are so anxious to get moving on into your ministry today? Perhaps you might stay here with me for a while and explore these feelings you are having?"

When we hear this story of Jesus being tested and tempted, perhaps we think how difficult this time was for him. He deprived himself of food and drink. We might say he fasted. If you have ever fasted, you know that your body loves the rest, doesn't it? It loves to slow down and recalibrate, to release all kinds of harmful toxins, to regroup all the vital organs and to, well, to just *breathe again*.

Your body *loves* the fast, but that devil in your head is trying really hard to convince you that you are absolutely gonna *die* if you don't have those chips, if you don't drink that coffee, if you don't have your three to five meals-- *and snacks*-- for a whole day or two!

Think about your last surgery. You were hoping for a morning time in the OR so you wouldn't have to wait around in pre-op all day without any food or drink. The devil is right there with you anyway, telling you how much you're going to hurt, how ugly you look in that plastic cap with the rubber band thingy holding it on your punkin head, and how you are absolutely going to *starve* if you go without your food for a day.

Really.

For Jesus, the fast gives his body and Spirit that breathing room he is needing. For Jesus, the fast is a sacred deprivation, filling himself with

God-thoughts instead of bread and wine and meat and 1st Century snacks. The devil is trying to convince him that he is hungry, but Jesus chooses instead to remember his scriptural lessons. He mutters aloud to no one but that devil inside him, "*It takes more than bread to really live.*"

This is the first lesson of the wilderness. You don't really *have to eat* all the time, you really can get in touch with your surroundings and the way your body feels when you are not consumed by what you are not able at that moment to *consume*. In the slowing down of your bodily systems, you gain clarity and gratefulness for all the bounty that God provides us in our daily lives.

Next, the devil speaking in his head tempts Jesus with power and glory. In his wandering wilderness daydream, he is taken up on a high hill overlooking all of Jerusalem and he gets full of himself for a while, thinking that he is destined and chosen for great things!

"God has called me! I'm special! God even sent a dove specially from heaven to anoint me as his Beloved Son! Me!" he thinks briefly. It must have been intoxicating for a young man born to an unwed woman out in the cold of the night air in a makeshift delivery ward to think of himself as special! It must have been a powerful voice inside his head telling him, "Hey, Jesus! You deserve better than you have. You could be a wealthy Pharisee! You could be a great teacher! Look at all the wives you could have, at all the riches that could be yours. You could live in *style*, brother!"

I know many of you have given up these same temptations to be underpaid and underappreciated in your work as teachers, ministers, musicians, and missionaries. It is mesmerizing, this American obsession with wealth and power. I have fallen under its spell myself. I earn a whole lot less now than I did in the law profession, but I am a whole lot happier now, a whole lot more centered. In slowing down, in jumping out of the American rat race, we can be intentional about what matters. We can spend more time with family and friends, welcome grandchildren into our hearts, and most importantly, make room in there for God-things so that we can recognize the God-gifts that are winging their way to us every day.

Jesus makes a choice out on that hilltop to eschew the things of this world—its trappings, its false pleasures, its inevitable empty spaces. He chooses God instead. He tells that devil in his head, “Worship the Lord your God and only the Lord your God. Serve God with absolute single-heartedness.” He chooses to slow down. He chooses to be led by the Spirit’s love-call rather than by his own ambition.

In his hunger he finds clarity. In his awareness of the lure of fame, he finds humility. Now his devil wants to tease him with a false-bottom treasure chest of immortality.

Folks in Jesus’ day didn’t typically live very long into their adult lives. Prophets met untimely ends more often than not. Occupied peoples were starving—not fasting, but truly *starving* for food, for clean water, for work, and for relationship. Occupation under the Romans was harsh; life as

a Jewish person was dangerous, precarious, and full of other's biting judgments.

The religious leaders were hard on the people; the faithful people were hard on themselves. They engaged in ritual self-abuse. Folks were not treated well; they bore the brunt of condemnation at every turn, being told they were not good enough, they were not faithful enough, and they were not holy enough. Jewish men and women could be stoned to death for what we today would not even consider a crime.

Yes, it was a hard life, a short life for many, a life that was much too long for others. To daydream about immortality and all the pleasures and privileges that might go along with that—now *there* was a temptation for our young Jesus wandering out there alone in the wilderness with just his self-doubt, his resentments, and his secret wishes.

In slowing down out there, Jesus was able to realize what really mattered to him. He was able to come to terms with the reality that what he was about to do out in the world would probably jeopardize his life. The normal and expected family life of a Jewish man would not be his; prophets are not welcome, after all, in their hometown. Who would want him? Who would want the dangers that his ministry would bring to them? What matchmaker would find him to be much of a prize for an available bride? He would have no riches. He would have no power on earth. He would have no time for family and children and a hearth.

In his slowing down he was able to find himself, to claim his focus, to release his pride, and to own his fate. He was ready to face the world again. That voice in his head—you all know it—we all have it—the “devil that made me do it” voice in his head retreated, retreated until it could taunt him and tempt *us* on another day.

And so, I looked at the officer when he asked me if I had a reason for going so fast. I could have made up something clever, pulled out my minister’s i.d. and claimed I was being called to someone’s side, claimed I was about *God’s* work or other important tasks, but I didn’t. The devil in my head that was tempting me to misbehave had to be satisfied by pestering me and tempting me another day.

“No, Sir,” I said, and I said no more. He told me he needed my insurance and registration, and I asked him if it was alright for me to reach into my glove box to get those for him. With my identity in hand, he told me to wait there. He went back to his very unfair black, *unmarked* pickup truck and wrote me out a citation. And then he returned with my papers and my prize, calmly explaining to me the procedures I was to follow. The devil said to me in my head, “Yeah, yeah, yeah, if you won’t play the minister card, tell him you know all about it, that you are a long-standing and long-suffering court judge, a public servant and he’ll let you off,” but I said nothing. I was wrong in going that fast and I knew it. I had no excuse.



And then I said the stupidest thing to the officer of the law: I said, "Thank you for stopping me today. I needed to slow down." I'll bet he didn't hear that often, if ever. Stupid maybe, but true.

I did. I needed to slow down, and I did. Out there in the wilderness of Russellville Road where no one *ever* goes, I slowed down and thanked Spirit silently for the lesson. I thanked God that I didn't hit an animal or catch a rim and flip my car that day because I was driving too fast. I thanked the devil for visiting me and trying hard to trick me.

There are more important things than getting out of a jam; there are higher principles worth protecting even at your own loss of points and pennies. There are wilderness experiences that reset your personal compass *and* speedometer. I hope I go another 25 years without a ticket. And now I really mean it when I say in closing,

*May it Be So.*