

**New Castle United Methodist Church
510 Delaware Street
New Castle, DE 19720**

**The Message for January 17, 2021
“In the Wilderness”
Matthew 4:1-11
Pastor Ray Eck**

Today, we will follow Jesus into the hands of the tempter. This entire scene in the wilderness happened once before in Garden of Eden when the first man and woman were tempted by the devil. But where Adam and Eve failed, Jesus succeeds. Instead of silently listening to Satan's lies and disobeying God's Word, Jesus proves he is our blameless, sinless Savior. Jesus is the one who lived the obedient life that we should be living. Jesus is the one who died the death we deserve for our disobedience as we live in sin. Jesus is the only one who never fell short of God's glory; the only one who lived in perfect submission; the only one who can represent us, rescue us, and restore us before our Father in heaven.

Last week, Matthew told us of John the Baptist who was sent by God to prepare the way for the Lord. We too have been asked to prepare the way for others and to introduce Jesus to them. Just as a tree is expected to bear fruit, God's people should produce a crop of good deeds. God has no use for people who call themselves Christians but do nothing about it. Like many people in John's day who were God's people in name only, we are of no value if we too are Christians in name only. If others cannot see our faith, we may not be God's people at all. We must live by faith as we serve others.

In chapter 4, Matthew tells us that *immediately after His baptism*, Jesus is led by the same Holy Spirit into wilderness to be tempted by the devil. You see, even in our lives, our greatest moments of temptation often follow the greatest moments of exaltation. The blessing of new marriage, a promotion at work, or finding a new church where you feel welcome and loved. Even the birth of a new child or grandchild provides an environment that is ripe for temptation. The temptation to sin always lurks nearby.

It is not by accident that Jesus finds himself in the wilderness; it is by design. God does not lead him into temptation, but He does lead him into a barren forbidden place to be... *exposed to temptation*.

We are thankful that God often leads us into good things, but we need to also learn to appreciate the times when he leads us into difficult times with potentially bad outcomes. At some point in our walk of faith, all of us will be led into a wilderness. We have all been there, and some of us are there right now, still others aren't sure how you even know when you've been drawn into that dark place. No one knows for sure exactly where the "wilderness" is that Jesus was led into. We do know that between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea, there is a large wilderness area of desert between the hill country and the Dead Sea, a quiet, barren place called *Jeshimon*.

For some, the wilderness is that place or time where you are literally devastated physically and emotionally. For others, the wilderness is that place where you just feel lost, uncertain, or confused about decisions you are supposed to make or when we are trying to figure out the true purpose of our life. For others, the wilderness is that place where you feel empty, hungry, and dissatisfied with life. Have you ever felt that way?

I believe the wilderness is that place where God takes you to be alone with Him. It is the place where there is no one or anything that can help you fix that problem you have. And because of that, your wilderness becomes the place where you are tempted to compromise, to disbelieve, and to sin in order to resolve your problem, apart from God. The Wilderness is that hellish place where you are desperate for a savior to rescue you. The temptation is to find something or someone other than Jesus to save you.

So why does God lead us into wilderness? No one wants to be in a wilderness experience, but everyone needs one. God chooses to take us to where the only thing we have is Him. He leads us there so that we will get closer to Him.

The English word "*tempt*" means to entice us to do the wrong thing or invite us to sin. The word is better understood as a time of testing. We will all be tested in the wilderness. When we hear the word "test," it sounds as if God is on some kind of mission to test whether or not we have faith, the faith to believe that he is for us and not against us.

In his letter to 1st century Jewish Christians, James, the apostle, the brother of Jesus, writes this in Chapter 1, vs.4:

"Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,
for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.
And let steadfastness have its full effect, so that you may
be made perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

Though Satan tries to break us through temptations, God uses them to build us up. Satan intends temptations to make us weaker, but testing is one of God's methods for reinforcing our faith. God turns up the heat not to burn us, but to make our trust in Him stronger.

The Wilderness is not the enemy. All too often we are so distracted by the difficulties of the wilderness that we ignore the real danger in the wilderness. You have a real enemy who wants to destroy you in the wilderness. He wants more than just your death; he wants your worship. He has over 40 names in Scripture, including Satan, Lucifer, the Prince of Darkness, and the evil one, but Matthew chooses to call him... *the devil*. There are no physical descriptions of the devil, though our culture has come up with some creative ones. What we do know is that the devil was a creation of God, an angel who once rebelled against God because he wanted to be God. God cast him out of heaven along with his followers, a third of the angels in heaven. From the beginning, the devil's agenda has been to rob God of glory by destroying God's people, and destroying the Savior himself, Jesus Christ. He is defeated but he is defiant. Since the Garden of Eden, the enemy has appealed to the same three things: our desire to feel good, our desire to be independent of God, and our desire to have more things.

The first thing Jesus does in the wilderness is prepare for battle by fasting for 40 days. It might seem strange to deprive yourself of food when you are about to go into a great battle. But by fasting, Jesus is saying, "I want you God, I hunger for you God. I need You more than anything else this world has to offer." Above all, Jesus knows that this is what is tested in the wilderness. Christian fasting is the hunger of a homesickness for God. If we do not have strong desires for the love of God, then there is no room for the great love of God; the very thing we all need more of. When we find ourselves in the wilderness, we need to draw closer to God. We need to make ourselves hungry, so that we are desperately dependent on the Lord.

Jesus also prepares himself with Old Testament scripture. Jesus spent 40 days meditating on the words from Deuteronomy. This was the last book that Moses wrote in the wilderness, before his death and before the Israelites, now lead by Joshua, walked into the Promised Land to battle the enemies of God. It was written 1400 years before Jesus was born. Deuteronomy is called "The Second Law" because it is a review of God's law. Moses believed their best defense was in remembering what God had already said. This book is where all of Jesus' responses to the devil's temptations come from.

Temptation is not simply the devil's effort to disobey what God says. Temptation is the devil's effort to break your trust in who God is. The Devil tempts Jesus that if he will worship him, he will give Jesus everything he has ever longed for. And finally, this is Satan's goal at the heart of all the temptation. He wants Jesus to deny God all together.

Jesus is taken from the wilderness to the top of the temple and finally to a very high mountain to see all the kingdoms of the world. What a sight that must have been. He not only sees every nation, but he sees all of their glory, all of their power, technology, wealth, pleasure, art, beauty, and everything you could ever have. In a single moment, Jesus is offered everything there is in the entire world. This is the world he created. This is the world that he loves, the world that he came to save. This is a very real temptation for Jesus, the man. It is not simply an offer of power; it is an offer for the King to rule the Kingdom he came for; he just has to bow down and worship Satan.

But Jesus' response is a bold declaration of the 1st Commandment. You shall worship the Lord your God only and serve only Him. Choosing to worship God means choosing to serve God; and choosing to serve God meant choosing the cross. Christ conquers Satan and wins our salvation by giving up control. He achieves power through sacrifice, and He becomes wealthy by giving it all away.

My friends, Jesus did not go into the wilderness for himself; He went there for you and for me. He suffered through temptations so he might be able to help those who are tempted, in their own wilderness. Jesus understands every temptation you have ever experienced and every temptation you will ever experience.

The King is on the throne of grace to give us mercy when we fall in the wilderness and he gives us grace to get out of it. We can be encouraged that there is no temptation that can conquer us because we know the one who has conquered them all. God wants you to experience the wilderness because he wants you to trust Him. Your wilderness is not a curse; it is a gift from the Lord so that you might know him more, depend on him more, and serve Him more through the power of Jesus. We have no power on our own to defeat Satan, the liar of all liars, as he tries to tempt us in our lives. The Word of God is the ammunition the Lord has given us to defend ourselves.

Our Lord lives and reigns today in the hearts of all who love him.

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow...Because He lives all fear is gone.

*Because I know, I know he holds the future
and life is worth the living... just Because He Lives.*



Music for January 17

-- Bill Mathews, Director of Music Ministries

There are times we don't know much about the history of a hymn. That's the case with our first one this week – *How Firm a Foundation*. We do know it came from a collection published by an English minister, John Rippon, but it was attributed to an author only known as "K." Nevertheless, it is a text "firmly" based on scripture, so I've put the lyrics and the corresponding scriptures side by side below. It is commonly sung to the tune "Foundation," but in older hymnals, it can be found to "Adeste Fideles" (*O Come All Ye Faithful*) – trying singing it to that tune!

- ***How Firm a Foundation*, UMC Hymnal no. 529,**
sung by Fernando Ortega, contemporary Christian singer and songwriter
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZLDWfnfl5Dc>

<p><u>Verse 1</u> "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in his excellent word! What more can he say than to you he hath said, to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?"</p>	<p><u>2 Timothy 2:19, NIV</u> ¹⁹ Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."</p>
<p><u>Verse 2</u> "Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed, for I am thy God and will still give thee aid; I'll strengthen and help thee, and cause thee to stand upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand."</p>	<p><u>Isaiah 41:10, NIV</u> ¹⁰ So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."</p>
<p><u>Verses 3-4</u> "When through deep waters I call thee to go, the rivers of woe shall not thee overflow; for I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless, and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress. "When through fiery trials thy pathways shall lie, my grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply; the flame shall not hurt thee; I only design thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine."</p>	<p><u>Isaiah 43:2, NIV</u> ² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze."</p>
<p><u>Verse 5</u> The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose, I will not, I cannot, desert to his foes; That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake, I'll never, no never, no never forsake!</p>	<p><u>Deuteronomy 31:6,8, NIV</u> ⁶ Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you." ⁸ The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."</p>

- music continues on the next page

Joseph Scriven was a man whose own personal life was filled with much tragedy. He wrote the hymn, *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*, to comfort his mother at a time of deep sorrow. Years later, as he lay ill, the manuscript was found at his bedside by a friend. When asked if he had written it, Scriven replied, "The Lord and I did it between us." He never intended that anyone else should see it, but tied with the music of Charles C. Converse, its message has lifted many a soul in need. As we reflect on the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness as well as our own temptations, perhaps we'll find the answer in verse 2...

- ***What a Friend We Have in Jesus*, UMC Hymnal no. 526**
sung by Alan Jackson
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=znWu2HCJ92c>

Verse 1

What a friend we have in Jesus,
 all our sins and griefs to bear!
 What a privilege to carry
 everything to God in prayer!
 O what peace we often forfeit,
 O what needless pain we bear,
 all because we do not carry
 everything to God in prayer.

Verse 2

Have we trials and temptations?
 Is there trouble anywhere?
 We should never be discouraged;
 take it to the Lord in prayer.
 Can we find a friend so faithful
 who will all our sorrows share?
 Jesus knows our every weakness;
 take it to the Lord in prayer.

Verse 3

Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?
 Precious Savior, still our refuge; take it to the Lord in prayer.
 Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer!
 In his arms he'll take and shield thee; thou wilt find a solace there.



“ZOOM” Worship every Sunday @ 11am

Order of Worship and sign-in information
 are on pages 8-10

Click on this link (or copy it into your browser):

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85010951342?pwd=NldWQnlQUmRBQ0hRbWdERVN3VitLdz09>



✓ **Food Closet Needs**

- ✓ Instant oatmeal packets
- ✓ Peanut Butter & Jelly
- ✓ Pasta & Spaghetti Sauce
- ✓ Ramon Noodles
- ✓ Canned Soup... Progresso or Chunky
- ✓ Canned Fruit
- ✓ Canned Tuna
- ✓ 1 lb Bag of Rice or Rice a Roni

And remember, store brands are always acceptable.



Tristan Beeson, Pam Whary's nephew, and the Fire Company he's associated with, affected by COVID

James Costenbader, Anita Counterman's son-in-law

Joanne Davis

Richard Hastings

Jerry and Sally Knotts

Tammy McAleese

Doris Murphy, friend of Eva Taylor

Ron Pochvatilla

Joan Skilton's daughter, Sue, and her family

Janet Stutzman

Margaret Weyl

Greyson, a 3-year-old boy diagnosed with neuroblastoma.

Those diagnosed with the coronavirus and the families of those who have lost loved ones

The staff and the patients of our nursing homes

The homeless

Those who struggle with addiction

If you have someone that you'd like included on our Prayer List, please let us know by contacting either Doris Poultney, Prayer Chain Coordinator, @ 302-378-1184, or Pastor Ray @ 302-740-3932 or snowman3girls@gmail.com



New Castle
United Methodist Church
 "Zoom" Worship Service
 January 17, 2021 at 11am
 2nd Sunday after the Epiphany

If you have a computer, smartphone, or tablet...

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85010951342?pwd=NldWQnlQUmRBQ0hRbWdERVN3VitLdz09>

For those using a regular phone... the number for our Zoom Worship is (301) 715-8592.
 Remember... the phone number is long-distance and you should be sure your phone plan covers it.

Meeting ID: 850 1095 1342

Passcode: 12345. On a computer, then hit "Enter." On a phone, then hit "#".

Order of Worship

The Greeting

Pastor Ray Eck

Introit: *My Tribute*

Bill Mathews

How can I say thanks for the things You have done for me?
 Things so undeserved, yet You give to prove Your love for me.
 The voices of a million angels could not express my gratitude;
 All that I am and ever hope to be, I owe it all to Thee

To God be the glory, to God be the glory,
 To God be the glory for the things He has done.
 With His blood He has saved me; with His power He has raised me;
 To God be the glory for the things He has done.

UMC Hymnal, no. 99
 CCLI Song # 11218
 CCLI License # 11400870

- ...our service continues on the next page

Call to Worship

Pastor Ray and Gail Wade, Liturgist

Pastor: When Jesus was in the wilderness, he was tempted to save himself.

Liturgist: We often look for the good things in life for ourselves first, before considering the well-being of others.

Pastor: Jesus was offered salvation if he turned stones to bread; if he accepted wealth and power, if he tested God's commitment to him.

Liturgist: In all these things, Jesus remained strong in his commitment to God.

Pastor: May our commitment be as strong.

Liturgist: May we place our lives in God's caring hands throughout our journey, knowing that God is always faithful to us, comforting, guiding, and lifting us up, till we see the light of his Holy love.

Opening Prayer

Gail Wade

Lord, the temptations of the world loom large before us. We are enticed, cajoled, and encouraged to move from our lives of service to lives of self-centeredness. As you resisted the temptations in the wilderness, help us to be strong when we are faced with temptations in our own lives. Instill in us confidence to always do the right thing and to always give you all the glory. We pray in Jesus' Holy name. Amen.

A TIME OF SHARING

Please "unmute" your device as we enter our time of prayer.

Our Joys and Concerns

Pastor Ray

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Please place your device back on "mute after the Lord's Prayer."

Scripture Lessons

Gail Wade

John 1:1-5 and 9-12

Matthew 4:1-11

Liturgist: This is the Word of God for the people of God.

People: Thanks Be to God, Amen!

Special Music: *I Need Thee Every Hour*

Rick Schiller

words by Annie S. Hawks, music by Robert Lowry

The Message: "In the Wilderness of Our Lives"

Pastor Ray

- ...our service continues on the next page

Closing Hymn: Precious Lord, Take My Hand

Bill Mathews

Verse 1

Precious Lord, take my hand,
 Lead me on, let me stand,
 I am tired, I am weak, I am worn;
 Through the storm, through the night,
 Lead me on to the light:
 Take my hand, precious Lord,
 Lead me home.

Verse 2

When my way grows drear,
 precious Lord, linger near,
 When my life is almost gone,
 Hear my cry, hear my call,
 hold my hand lest I fall:
 Take my hand, precious Lord,
 Lead me home.

Verse 3

When the darkness appears and the night draws near,
 And the day is past and gone,
 At the river I stand, guide my feet, hold my hand:
 Take my hand, precious Lord,
 Lead me home.

...UMC Hymnal, no. 474

Benediction

Pastor Ray

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling
 and present you before his glorious presence
 without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior,
 be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord,
 before all ages, now and forevermore. Amen!
 Jude 24-25

A CLOSING SCRIPTURE

***Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands.
 Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing.
 Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us,
 and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
 Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise,
 be thankful unto him, and bless his name.
 For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting;
 and his truth endureth to all generations.***
 Psalm 100, KJV