

“Less Than God Intends” 2016
Deuteronomy 8:1-2, 11-16 Luke 4:1-13

When I was younger and growing up in Northern Virginia, Old Rag, a mountain in the Shenandoah National Forest, was one of my favorite places to go hiking and camping. There were lots of places to camp along the trail leading to the summit but by far the best places to camp were just after the summit on the other side... where there was a natural spring for cool and clean water, and perfect campsites with a gorgeous view of the valley. But a surprising number of campers would stop and set-up their camp at inferior sites on the way up, and settle-in when the trail started to climb more steeply. Camping before reaching the summit was easier and more convenient, but setting up too soon was a mistake that meant missing out on way better campsites a little further on. **So too, I think, that sometimes we compromise and settle for less and easier, and thereby miss out on the more and better blessings that God intends for us.**

In the Deuteronomy text, Israel has reached the end of their 40 year wilderness trek and they are finally poised to enter the Promised Land. Moses reminds them not to forget the lessons learned along the way.

vs. 2, 15-16

Remember the long way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. ... He made water flow for you from flint rock, and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good.

All along the way the Lord had provided for them, and by God's steadfast loving kindness and care they survived and thrived along their wilderness journey. Because they had experienced God's faithfulness amid adversity, they had grown, and they had learned to trust and rely on God, * **and by their struggles and testing they had been blessed.** The wilderness served the useful purpose of preparing them for their mission, for life in the Promised Land ... **for living faithfully in-sync with God's will and purpose.** And now as they enter to live in the Promised Land, Moses warns, don't be distracted by the prosperity and comforts of the land, or forget the lessons of God's provision and blessings that they had learned along the wilderness journey. * **Stay attentive and in-sync with God, so that you can receive the fullness and blessings that God intends for you.**

Some time ago I began converting several old VHS tapes onto DVDs, but for some reason, on some of the DVDs I made, the audio and video are **not quite synchronized.** So you will see one character's lips start to move a few moments before you hear them begin speaking, and if another character responds or answers quickly, you see their lips move before the first finishes... **and so it gets very confusing, difficult to enjoy a movie when the audio and video are even slightly out of sync.** But it's not just audio and video signals that can get out of sync. **Sometimes you or I can get out of sync with God's will and purpose, God's intention for our lives...** wanting to do good, perhaps even for the right reason, yet we do the wrong thing, the wrong way, at the wrong time. In contrast to you or me getting out of sync with God and God's plan, Luke's Gospel describes how Jesus was in-sync with God, with God's will and purpose.

vs. 1-2

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 40 days Jesus was tempted in the wilderness were preparation, corresponding to the Israelites 40 years in the wilderness, to the 40 days Moses fasted preparing to receive the 10 Commandments at Mt. Sinai; to the 40 days the prophet Elijah fasted in preparation to confront and defeat the priests of Baal at Mt. Horeb. The word, "tempted" has a connotation and meaning in our culture, of being enticed to so

something... like when a bakery fan blows the smell of freshly baked bread out into the street to tempt or entice passersby to break their diet. But the word for "tempt" in the original Greek is more like a teacher testing to confirm what the students have learned, or an athlete testing to see how much weight he can lift... or Jesus being tempted or tested to demonstrate and reveal his faithfulness and obedience to the will and purpose of God. The first temptation Jesus faced was to use his authority and power for turning stones into bread for his own needs and benefit,

vs. 3

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread."

If you really are the Son of God, or since you are the Son of God, show me your power, prove yourself and demonstrate your worth. Consider, beyond his own hunger and the rumblings in his belly, and how tempting it would be to feed all of the world's hungry, by transforming lots of the stones into lots of bread and making enough food to satisfy all the starving masses. What an opportunity to solve one of humankind's worst problems, by providing enough food for everyone to eat and be fed... **but that's not why God sent Jesus, that's not why Jesus came.** God had a much bigger mission and intended purpose for Jesus...far more than filling a few empty bellies, Jesus came to feed and fill hollow and empty souls... * ... **so instead of making bread, Jesus was faithful to his mission.** He came to proclaim the Good News, and replied,

vs. 4

Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

Full of the Holy Spirit, and armed with God's word in Scripture, Jesus would not be distracted from his true mission and call. Ironically, later and within God's will, God's purpose and timing, Jesus did miraculously make bread to feed a huge crowd of 5000- - not for his own benefit, but to teach about God's grace... **and so it never supplanted his true mission and purpose.** So too we can be distracted & tempted by lesser goals & objectives, other than our true mission as the Church, and as Christians to faithfully proclaim the Good News and to reflect God's love and light to a world lost in the darkness. The second temptation,

Vs. 5-7

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 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. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."

How tempting to accept the easy and painless quick solution. Just accept Satan's offer by giving in to the temptation of immediate power and success, without paying the cost, **and skip the more difficult way of obedience to God.** Ironically, later, after his death and resurrection, within God's will, purpose and timing, Jesus was glorified at the time of the ascension.

The next temptation,

vs. 9-12

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, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

How tempting to take just a little short-cut and go for popular approval and the glitter of success. Surely such an amazing show of God's power would have impressed them and maybe even avoided all the suffering, that crucifixion and dying thing. Even his harshest critics and enemies would have been impressed. BUT that's not why God sent Jesus, as explained in

John 3:16-17

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ... in order that the world might be saved through him.

Jesus came to accomplish God's love and plan for our salvation, not to perform a magic show of God's power, wonder and might. Ironically, later, within God's will and intended purpose, Jesus did perform lots of very impressive signs and miracles, and he did demonstrate God's power by those mighty deeds, but they were done according to God's will and timing **and doing miracles never became his primary mission and purpose.**

In Luke 4:43 Jesus explained, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God; for I was sent for this purpose."

It's really a matter of focus and staying on target. * In a hungry world, why not just make more bread? * In a world of brokenness, oppression and bondage, why not just take over and rule with strong justice? * In a world apathetic and distracted, why not just do the impressive to entice and attract? **It is tempting to seek the quick-fix, easy-short-cut solutions. But instead, we are called to wait, to listen and obey God, just as Jesus refused to exercise power and authority apart from obeying the will, plan and timing of God.** Satan, the tempter, is the embodiment of disobedience to God: evil, is the corruption and compromise of good, often by taking shortcuts, by force, by doing things our own way evil, is taking control rather than submitting to God. **Another name for Satan is out-of-sync willful impatience,** "I'll do it my way, and I'll accomplish it right now!" **Our call is to walk and grow in our faith, to journey with Christ, and if we are faithful, through us, Jesus will change the world.** Maybe not all at once, and not by the political power we wield, but by showing love and compassion, one life at a time, one hug at a time, and by one act of mercy at a time.

We are at the beginning of Lent, our soul's spiritual journey **walking with Jesus toward Easter.** Wouldn't it be more pleasant, easier and more convenient to move right into the joyful celebration of Easter, and just skip the unpleasantness and messiness of betrayal, abandonment, crucifixion and death? **But that's not how it works, for if there is no death, then there cannot be resurrection. Lent is a time to listen and seek to hear God's will and voice, for self-examination and exploration so to deepen our faith. Those are tasks for which there are no short cuts or quick fixes, and we have to be patient and attentive to get in sync with God.** ** And anything else is to settle for far less than the abundant grace and full blessings God intends. The message of this passage is really deceptively simple: it's about the will of God, and making that alone our priority, which is to say, "no" to any and all other gods & lesser goals.

We have been called and set apart by God, blessed and equipped to serve God's holy purpose, by walking in-step with God as the Holy Spirit directs us. * **So how do we live out our lives in sync with God and God's will?** It begins with prayer, consistent & personal prayer on our own as well as with partners in prayer who support one another. It is critical to include regular feeding on God's word, in order to focus our hearts and minds in-sync with the Lord. And a healthy and growing walk with God **happens in community** – a family for fellowship where we can connect and be known, and as a place to bring our gifts in Christian service. **But being in sync with God and knowing what to do or say is not always easy or obvious...** sometimes it's going with someone else's idea or vision, other times it's taking a stand against what we see...but either way, it's waiting on the Lord in humility & gentleness, by reflecting God's gracious love and presence in our life, by seeking to be **faithfully in-sync with God's purpose.** It could well be

God's will today, for us to get moving on some task, or it could be to stop pushing, and to wait upon the Lord. **We won't know which it is, until we abide, stop for God to speak... until we abide, and we are in-sync with God's Spirit to receive the full fruits of grace, as God intends.** As Jesus promised and explained, in

John 15:4-5

Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.