

**February 26, 2023 First Sunday in Lent**

**Ladue Chapel Presbyterian Church**

**Matthew 4:1-11**

**"A Travelling Companion"**

**Douglas T. King**

With whom we share the journey makes all the difference in the world. Over the years I have gone on trips with a variety of my friends. And I know that with whom I travel will shape the trip even more than the geographical location we will be visiting. If Marta and I are traveling with our friends Ted and Kay I know there will be much laughter and silliness; traveling with Sandy and Alden leads to many fascinating conversations; traveling with Jeff and Linda means lots of lazy afternoons.

On this first Sunday in Lent we are reminded of the metaphor that this season is one in which we are called to journey with Jesus as he makes his way to Jerusalem and the cross. So today is an appropriate moment to ponder the implications of what it means to have Jesus as a traveling companion.

Our text from the gospel of Matthew is an excellent place to start this conversation. After being baptized by John, the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness. This encounter with the tempter is not some unlucky accident or unforeseen circumstance. Before Jesus can begin his ministry he must define what kind of savior he will be, and what kind of savior he will not be.

In these temptations we learn a good deal about who Jesus is and how he will function, and thus much about what kind of traveling companion he will be on our journey of faith.

The first temptation is brilliant in its simplicity. Why not turn stones into bread? Jesus is hungry. No harm will be done to anyone. It is the perfect quick fix. And it comes with a great "if," "if you are the Son of God command these stones to become loaves of bread." Jesus has yet to do a single thing to demonstrate his status as savior and it would be fair for him to wonder to himself what kind of power he possesses.

But Jesus trusts in the power bestowed upon him. And he knows his power is not for quick fix parlor tricks. His power is not for immediate gratification. His power will be used to illuminate how God will fulfill the deepest hungers of our soul. Of course, Jesus wants all people to be fed but he is called to a deeper, wider, and more all-encompassing transformation than solely solving any single temporal problem. He responds, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

So what kind of traveling companion does this make Jesus? If you want someone whose only concern is your immediate comfort you will need to find someone else. Jesus is focused on bigger things, by the very Word of God which he quotes. His eyes are on all of who we are, body and soul. If you are looking for someone to make sure you are comfortable, look elsewhere. If you are looking to be taught to trust in God's providence even when it appears to be lacking, Jesus is the one with whom you wish to travel. If you are looking for someone to reach down deep inside of you and feed your deepest needs then Jesus is the one with whom you wish to travel. We have a savior who knows what it is to be hungry and knows our hunger.

The second temptation ups the ante. He is lifted up to the very pinnacle of the temple. The tempter now challenges Jesus by

quoting scripture back at him, the ninety-first psalm. "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

Surely it is not too much to ask for Jesus to accept the protection being the Son of God could offer him. In jumping he could prove how much he trusts in God. But Jesus responds, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Jesus is so confident in God's abiding care that he does not trivialize it by demanding to be excluded from all harm. His trust in God runs deeper than the need to be provided with a divine suit of armor. Jesus knows he is cherished and protected by God in the eternal and most important ways.

So what kind of traveling companion does this make Jesus? Well, traveling with Jesus comes with no guarantee that we will be protected from all the ways the world can harm us. There may very well be bumps and bruises along the way. But if we want to learn that the pains of this life are no evidence against the guarantee that we are protected by God in the most eternal of ways, then Jesus is the one with whom we wish to travel. We have a savior who knows what it is to feel pain and knows our pain.

But the adversary is not done with the temptations. Jesus is whisked up to a very high mountain and shown all of the kingdoms of the world in all of their glorious splendor. He is told, "All these I will give to you if you will fall down and worship me. Jesus responds, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

Jesus knows there are no shortcuts on this journey to transform and save the world. The preacher Tom Long says this,

"Indeed, this temptation may best be understood as the enticement to achieve the destination of his ministry without undergoing the sacrificial journey, to claim the victory without enduring struggle. But the ministry of Jesus will be hard and messy." (Long, p.39) Although the road will be long and difficult, Jesus trusts that God will not forsake him on the journey.

So what kind of traveling companion does this make Jesus? Well traveling with Jesus certainly comes with no expectation that life will be one smooth and effortless step after another. Clearly, we too are prone to challenging and difficult times along the way. Jesus will not be waving any magic wands to ensure all obstacles are cleared from our path. But if you are looking for someone who will lead you to trusting in God when the times are tough, then Jesus is the one with whom you need to be traveling. We have a savior that knows what it is to struggle and knows our struggles.

This is a difficult text. We learn of how hard the road will be for Jesus. His own personal needs will not be met all of the time. Stones will not be turned into bread. He will not rely on God to ensure his personal safety along the way. Jesus does not call on the angels to catch him should he fall. Jesus' power will not come from any shortcuts provided by bowing down before the tempter and the ways of the world but through the sacrifice of the cross.

So what does this mean for us? Our journey of faith with Jesus comes with no guarantees that our personal needs will be met at every turn. Our journey of faith with Jesus comes with no promises that we are immune to the dangers of this world. Our journey of faith with Jesus comes with no assurances that

our lives will be without struggle. Granted there is not a lot of good news in all of this. It would be a bummer if the sermon ended here.

But here comes the good news. When we travel with Jesus on our journey of faith we learn to trust in God even when our personal needs are not met. When we travel with Jesus on our journey of faith we learn that the pains of this world do not keep us from God's love. When we travel with Jesus on our journey of faith we learn that although life may be messy and hard, we go through it, all of it, with a God who goes through it with us.

We have a savior that knows our hunger, knows our pain, and knows our struggles.

When we choose to live our life seeking to journey beside Jesus, we are offered no guarantee of a life of ease. What we do receive is the opportunity to learn how to put our deepest trust in the presence and power of God beside us, sustaining us in the deepest of ways in all times and all places.

Let's own and carry this reality with us in this Lenten season and for all that is to come in our lives. We are traveling in the very best of company.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Long, Tom, *Matthew*, Westminster Bible Companion Series,  
Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 1997.