

On this first Sunday in Lent, we are entering a season that lasts 40 days. This period of time is based on the 40 days that Jesus spent in the desert, fasting and being tempted by the devil. Forty days. That's a long time to fast, eating "nothing at all." It's also a long time to be tempted by Satan.

Fortunately, Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit" during that time when he was "led by the Spirit into the wilderness." And as grueling as those 40 days must have been, they served a purpose -- God knew that Jesus needed to learn how to let go of some things while learning how to hold onto other things. In the desert it was almost as if Jesus was receiving firsthand knowledge or insight involving the concept of being lost and found.

Apparently throughout history, important items have been misplaced and recovered. Some are good and some are bad – and a book called *Found* actually features several different lists of things that have been lost and things that have been found: Discarded valentines, ransom notes, to-do lists, diaries, homework assignments, even a break-up letter written on the back of an airsickness bag. What do you think that letter said? "You make me sick"?

Important items are lost and found all over, from deserts to mountaintops. One list of lost items in particular features stuff lost exclusively on trains. Not on planes, buses, taxis or ships -- just trains. *Lost*: A rare Buddhist scripture. A Tibetan scholar accidentally left his laptop on the London Tube, losing nearly 1,000 pages of rare 17th-century Buddhist scriptures. *Found*: A boa constrictor named Penelope. In 2011, a woman lost her 3-foot-long pet serpent on a train. Authorities looked for it, and then confidently declared that "the locomotive was absolutely snake-free." One month later, Penelope was found in the next car.

*Lost*: A violin concerto. A British composer spent a whole year writing his first violin concerto. Then he lost it at London's Victoria Station. Starting from scratch, he took another whole year to finish Violin Concerto No. 2. *Found*: A

300-year-old Stradivarius violin, worth millions of dollars. In 2013, a musician lent his Stradivarius to a friend so that he could play it at a birthday party. But the friend lost it on a train in Switzerland. Don't you hate it when that happens? Fortunately a good Samaritan turned it in.

*Lost:* Ernest Hemingway. Well, not the author, but all of his early fiction. Hemingway's wife packed all of his papers in a suitcase and boarded a train in Paris. She hopped off the train to get a bottle of water, and when she returned, the suitcase was gone. None of the work had yet been published, so it was lost forever. And finally, *a valuable find:* Pete Seeger's banjo. The folksinger had carried his instrument on many trains, but, in the year 2000, he misplaced it while riding from New York City to Poughkeepsie. Fortunately, someone turned it in to the Lost and Found, and it was eventually reunited with its owner.

Scriptures, concertos and manuscripts. *Lost.* Snakes, violins and banjos. *Found.* Some are bad and some are good. Some should be released, and some should be grasped tightly. The challenge in life is to figure out what should be lost, and what should be found.

At the end of his 40 days in the wilderness, you might say Jesus knew exactly what he needed to let go of and what he needed to look for and hold on to. Luke tells us that he "ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished." In our Gospel this morning we witness the devil talking to Jesus saying, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." This is a tempting proposition, since Jesus is hungry, and certainly he has the power to transform a piece of marble into a piece of marbled rye. But Jesus answers, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" *Lost:* A loaf of bread to fill his stomach. *Found:* The nourishment of the Word of God.

We too face similar temptations whenever we feel empty inside and look for something physical to fill us up. Maybe it's a piece of Godiva chocolate, a big

screen 4k television, an item of custom jewelry, or the latest smart watch or activity tracker. Having such desires is nothing new -- people have been feeling this way for thousands of years.

In the time of Jesus, rich people wanted bigger barns to store their grain and their goods; as we witness later in Luke's Gospel in the Parable of the Rich Fool. Today we desire bigger homes, faster computers, and well-equipped cars with that new-car smell. But none of these things provides lasting satisfaction, and some things that we desire can be hazardous to our health -- that new-car smell is produced by the out-gassing of various volatile organic compounds.

Better to follow the example of Jesus who quotes Deuteronomy 8:3, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." This means choosing to "do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with our God," as the prophet Micah pointed out. It means following the great commandment of Jesus to love God, and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Such choices will nourish us and give us life. Much more than a loaf of bread. Or a brand new car.

Next, the devil leads Jesus up to a high place and shows him all of the kingdoms of the world. Satan says to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I may give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Apparently the devil believes he has authority over the kingdoms of the world, and he can give it to anyone he chooses. Jesus can have it, if he wants -- all he has to do is worship Satan. But Jesus says, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" *Lost: Authority over the kingdoms of the world. Found: Worshiping and serving God alone.*

In his book *The Road to Character*, David Brooks tells the story of Augustine, a fourth-century theologian. Augustine deeply desired fame and status

but found that these things didn't make him happy. Nothing he was accomplishing as a philosopher was giving him the contentment he desired. "Left to ourselves, we often desire the wrong things," writes Brooks. "Whether it's around the dessert tray, or in the late-night bar, we know we should choose one thing but end up choosing another." We understand our long-term interest, but end up pursuing short-term pleasures. Even good things such as friendship will leave us unsatisfied if the friendship is not attached to something higher.

In the end, Augustine turned to God and said, "Our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee." Nothing in this world will give us the rest and the peace that only God can give. That is why Jesus said *no* to authority over all the kingdoms of the world, and yes to worshiping and serving God alone.

Finally, the devil takes Jesus to Jerusalem, the holy city of God. Satan places him on the pinnacle of the temple and says, "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.'" The devil has now heard Jesus quote from Scripture twice, so he chooses to try it out for himself. In Psalm 91, Satan finds the words that he hopes will change Jesus' mind, words which are followed by the verse, "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone." The Bible says it. You can look it up.

In this case, quoting Scripture is a truly devilish move. But Jesus responds with the Bible once again: "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test!'" That's Deuteronomy 6:16. Jesus hears the devil's quotation of Psalm 91 and counters it with Deuteronomy 6. Yes, it is certainly true that God will send angels to "protect you" and "bear you up" in times of danger -- but not if you willfully put yourself in harm's way and challenge God to save you.

What's *lost* in this final temptation is a dramatic rescue by the angels of God. Perhaps a foreshadowing of Jesus' own Crucifixion when the crowd will tempt

him to save himself. What's *found* is a right relationship with God, one in which God is served rather than tested. Jesus knows that the verse from Deuteronomy he quoted about testing God is followed by the words, "Do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD, so that it may go well with you." Do not put the Lord your God to the test. Don't drink or do drugs, and then get on the highway, saying, "Save me, God!" Don't intentionally behave in promiscuous or reckless ways and then say, "Help me, Jesus!" Instead, do what is right and what is good.

Now once the temptations are over the devil departs from the Lord until an opportune time. Jesus has come through his lesson or game of "Lost and Found" by learning to let go of some things and searching for other things instead. In the end, he finds much more than he loses. And the same is true for us. We can find real nourishment in the word of God -- in teachings and wisdom from our Divine Father that show us the path to deep and lasting satisfaction. We can find rest and peace by worshiping God alone. And we can find safety and security in a right relationship with God, one that is based on serving instead of testing. Thankfully, as always, Jesus shows us the things that are worth finding and he also reveals to us what we should be willing to lose. Thanks be to God. Amen.