

## Three Tests

Each of the synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke – begin the story of Jesus’ ministry after he spends 40 days in the wilderness tempted by Satan. After Jesus is baptized before returning to Galilee to preach, to teach and to heal, he encounters the devil and in his responses to the devil’s testing, Jesus shows what the essence of his ministry will be. In each of the three tests, Jesus defines whom he is and what he has come to do.

On the last day of his life, Jesus will tell Pilate, “*My kingship is not of this world.*” Throughout his ministry, Jesus tries to help his disciples and others to move beyond the old, traditional expectations of the Messiah and embrace his messianic power of love. Of course, he is misunderstood; he is rejected; he is crucified. But the time of testing in the wilderness at the start helps us to prepare for the time of testing in the garden and on the cross at the end.

Turning stones into bread might be seen as a test of materialism, having the resources to alleviate hunger. Jesus, quoting scripture, responds to the devil by affirming that there are more important things in life than the material resources, security, food, wealth.

Ruling, controlling others, gaining power and authority, this political test, is an attempt by the devil to seduce Jesus away from God. Power and control are not the way to a fuller, meaningful life. Knowing, worshiping the one, true, living God is the only way to happiness, peace, unity.

The last test is a test of faith, belief, trust – a spiritual test. Will God really take care of us? Jesus shows us that it is not God who is tested. We are the ones tested.

Jesus encountered these same tests throughout his ministry. They are a part of his passion – his time in the garden, the trials, the suffering, the time on the cross. And we are reminded that Jesus was “*tempted in every way as we are; yet he did not sin.*”<sup>1</sup> He did not turn away from God. He did not forget God or feel that God had abandoned him.

So on this first Sunday in Lent after we have prayed the Great Litany, we might consider how we are tested:

- materially, with our need for security and resources;
- politically, in our relationships with others and our desires to control and have power, influence over others;
- spiritually, as we trust in ourselves and try to trust in God.

How have we been tested? How are we being tested? How will we be tested?

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 4:15; see *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 346.

Recently, I watched the DVD of the film *Unbroken*. I had read the book when it first came out in 2010 and became a best seller. This is the story of a young Army Air Corps officer who survives for 47 days on a raft in the Pacific Ocean after his plane crashes and, then, becomes a prisoner of the Japanese for over two years until the end of the war. The book is subtitled, "A World War II story of survival, resilience and redemption." What an amazing story of the human spirit empowered by faith and love and forgiveness.

Few of us will be tested like Louis Zamperini in *Unbroken*. Few of us will be tested like Jesus in the Wilderness, in the Garden, on the Cross. But all of us are tested. We are given choices. We make decisions. We are accountable. Our life in Christ, our life in the Church helps to prepare us for the tests whenever, however they come.

Deuteronomy 26:5-11

Psalm 91:9-15

Romans 10:8b-13

Luke 4:1-13