

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. 3The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." 4But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" 5Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6saying to him, "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.'" 7Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 8Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; 9and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." 10Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" 11Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.*

A garden and a wilderness. Two settings for the story of temptation.

A garden where all that was needed for life was provided. Companionship - the man and the woman together, food, daily work in tilling and keeping the garden. Best of all the Lord God, creator of heaven and earth walked in the garden – talked with the man and the woman. They had everything except that they were forbidden to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Wilderness - the place where predators ruled supreme – snakes, scorpions, lions, jackals. Here there was no forbidden fruit – no fruit at all - nothing to eat or drink for forty days. And no companion except the Spirit of God within him – the Spirit that had led him to this place of testing. No companion until the adversary appeared for that is what the word Satan means.

A garden and a wilderness – two settings but the same question – can God be trusted?

Adam and Eve had every evidence that God could be trusted – they lacked for nothing.

Since the moment when the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus and that Spirit led Jesus to the wilderness Jesus had no evidence – no sign of God's care. Yet it is the man and the woman Adam and Eve, who reach out and grasp the fruit that God had not given them. And Jesus who is hungry and thirsty does not.

The man and the woman rely on their own judgement – their own wisdom. It seems that this will bring them a godlike existence.

When sin is right before our eyes and we look at it and study it and choose it we always image that it will raise us up above the creaturely place God has given. A drug that will bring pleasure, wealth that promises security, lust that will fulfill an aching for love – each of these promises a happiness better than what we have known. Our hearts ache for something – some have said that it is God who has planted that ache within you and within me – some have said it is an aching – a longing for our creator. “Our souls are restless until they find their rest in you,” is the way St. Augustine said it.

In the wilderness that day the devil tempted Jesus to satisfy that ache with food – with testing God’s love - with power. But Jesus said no to turning stones into bread - no to leaping from the pinnacle of the temple into the arms of angels - no to the Devil’s offer of all the kingdoms of this world. The hungry and thirsty Jesus chose to live by God’s Spirit and God’s word – a word and a Spirit that would lead him to another wilderness – to the cross. There the testing was fiercer still when the world turned dark and no angels came to rescue him. In that wilderness he trusted still until death itself mocked him, claimed him.

Can God be trusted? The one who did not eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil died that day while all those who feasted on the fruit of the forbidden tree lived on.

Can God be trusted?

A few who found the tomb empty on Easter morning, and who were granted a glimpse and a touch of the once crucified one alive – those few staked their lives that the God whom Jesus trusted raised Jesus. They staked their lives on the promise that this God would raise them with Jesus. Jesus is the one who satisfied their aching for God.

In a garden or in a wilderness God can be trusted. In times of plenty and times of want, in health and in sickness, in companionship and in solitude, in life and in death God can be trusted. This is an easy thing to say but you and I are called to live it.

Sometimes it is tempting to think that because I am in a wilderness that it is okay that I just nibble a little on a forbidden fruit. We gather here each week so that the Spirit of God in us might strengthen us to resist. Jesus himself

needed God's word and God's Spirit to resist – how could you or I need anything less? I see some of you clinging to God's word and being strengthened by God's Spirit through pain, through sorrow, through disappointment, through betrayal, through good fortune, through fame, through prosperity, through being honored. You are all witnesses to me in your trusting in God.

And witnesses to one another. Amen.