



Thoughts on the Journey...

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3/10/19

In the early 1970's, comedian Flip Wilson appeared on the Ed Sullivan show. He performed a one-act skit where he played both a reverend and his wife. The reverend's wife came into the parsonage with a new dress in a box and the reverend asked his wife, "Why did you buy another dress? This is the third dress in a week?" Her response was, "I didn't want to buy this dress; the devil made me do it!" The reverend questions her further by asking her "how" the devil made her do it. In her very sassy way, the reverend's wife said, "I was walking down the street minding my own business singing a song when the devil came up behind me and told me how good I looked." The reverend wasn't falling for it and said to his wife, "I'm not buying it. Every time you do something wrong, you blame it on the devil." When her husband continued to press her about the devil's involvement in her buying a dress, his wife unfolded the scenario for him, "The devil told me to look at the dress in the window. He said it had lots of flowers on it and he knew I liked flowers. Then he said it was just my size and it was on sale." Then she said, "I looked at that devil and said 'No devil, I'm not buyin' no dress!'" The reverend's wife further explained that the devil told her, "Just try it on; there's no harm in trying it on!" She said no to the devil again and as hard as she tried to resist the temptation, the devil wasn't taking "no" for an answer. The reverend's wife goes on to explain that the devil then pushed her into the shop, pulled her over to where the dress was, threatened her with a gun, and then forced her to sign the reverend's name to the check! The reverend questioned her, "How come the devil always does things that benefit you and not me?" She responded, "I asked him about that and the devil said if it wasn't for him, you wouldn't even have a job!"

The skit was very funny, but had a strong element of truth to it. Temptation is usually a progressive process that comes in bits and pieces and appeals to our vulnerabilities. In our attempt to avoid sin, the devil often persists. If he doesn't get us from one angle, he will try from another angle and then the justification begins. Before we know it, we are doing the very thing we said we wouldn't do, which often leads to our looking for anyone or anything to blame.

In Luke's gospel this week, the Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the desert where He fasts for forty days and forty nights. Following, Jesus was hungry and probably vulnerable on several fronts. The devil seizes the opportunity and begins to tempt Jesus. He begins the first temptation

with "If you are the Son of God." Knowing full well who Jesus is, the devil tries to tempt Jesus by getting Jesus to abuse His power: by doing the will of Satan rather than the will of His Father.

There are three temptations that are presented to Jesus by the devil and three times Jesus rebukes the tempter with Scripture. When he challenges Jesus to turn rocks into bread, Jesus replies:

"It is written: One does not live on bread alone."

Then the devil takes Jesus and presents to Him all the kingdoms of the world and tells Him they can all be His if He will just worship him. Jesus replies:

"You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve."

Then Satan led Him to Jerusalem, made Him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said 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 guard you...*" Jesus said to him

"It also says, You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test."

In many circles in our society today, it is not fashionable to acknowledge the presence of the devil or to admit that Satan is alive and well and reigning havoc in our world. It is the denial of Satan's existence that leaves us most vulnerable. If he is so arrogant as to try to tempt the Son of God, why would we think that we are exempt from the lure of the devil's lies? What's even more disturbing is that a growing number of people don't believe in the existence of God. It is so much easier to deny the presence of the devil when we don't acknowledge the presence of God.

The season of Lent gives us the opportunity to look inside ourselves and address our sinfulness. What is of God? And what is not? Don't fool yourself into thinking that the devil isn't capable of tempting you. It's O.K. to say "The devil made me do it!" because the devil is always in close proximity when it comes to sin. But, we have a choice to cooperate with his deception or to cooperate with the grace of God; one leads to death, the other to new life.