

Lent annually takes us into the wilderness, and gives us lots of wilderness stories. I found this list of camping tips from BACKPACKER magazine, just FYI.

When using a public campground, a tuba placed on your picnic table will keep the campsites on either side vacant.

A hot rock placed in your sleeping bag will keep your feet warm. A hot enchilada works almost as well, but the cheese sticks between your toes.

Lint from your navel makes a handy fire starter. Warning: REMOVE lint from navel before applying the match.

This is a simple test to see if you qualify for solo camping. Shine a flashlight into one ear. If the beam shines out the other ear, do not go into the woods alone.

The guitar of the noisy teenager at the next campsite makes excellent kindling.

Bear bells provide an element of safety for hikers in grizzly country. The tricky part is getting them on the bears. Hey, is this a full-service Catholic Church or what?! You get all of that for free!!!

OK, down to business. First some background. There are 2 major biblical traditions about the devil. One tradition portrays him as a divinely assigned tester. He works in league with God to uncover what is in people heart. For example, in the book of Job, God and Satan have a heavenly conversation about Job. Is he really a righteous servant of the Lord or, as Satan suggests, is his righteousness only because God has put a fence around him, kept him safe from the sufferings of life? (Job 1:10). God agrees to put Job to the test to find out. This testing tradition is the deep background for the 40 days of testing of the Spirit leading Jesus into the wilderness in order to be tempted. The temptations will expose what is in Jesus' heart.

The second tradition portrays the devil not as an agent of God's purposes but as the enemy of God's purposes. "Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour." (1 Pet 5:8). This is the evil one, the one who enters into Judas (Jn 13:1), a murderer and liar from the beginning (Jn 8:44). Overtly and covertly, this evil one is bent on undercutting God's saving activity. He must be resisted; no suggestion of his can be entertained. This tradition of an evil one who seduces people into activities that go against God's will is also present in the temptations of Jesus.

The 2 traditions come together as this symbolic story reveals the steadfast heart of Jesus as he rejects Satan's strategies. These suggested strategies immediately follow Jesus' baptism, where in prayer He heard the voice of the ripped heavens address Him, "You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Therefore, most properly, these temptations focus on Jesus' identity. They are wrong ways of thinking about what it means to be the Son of God. But they can also be approached as messianic temptations. They are wrong ways of thinking about God's mission and how to carry it out. This is how we will interpret them – as faulty mission strategies that Jesus sees through and rejects.

Also, these temptations are placed at the beginning of Jesus' ministry and His rejection of them is definitive. But actually, they will haunt His kingdom activity from the beginning to the end. There will always be the temptation to see Himself as a miracle worker who caters to people's insistent physical demands, as someone who is ultimately trying to become king, or, at least, increase His political and religious power, and as

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someone who has yet to demonstrate that God approves of His words and deeds. These false interpretations are how other people saw Him, and how they wanted Him to perform. Jesus sees it in terms of His relationship to His Father and His will, and nothing deters Him in His fidelity as the Father's beloved son. (adapted from John Shea, THE RELENTLESS WIDOW, Cycle C, p. 63-64)

OK, so what? Each of these 3 temptations applies directly to our own lives as well. In the first temptation, Satan suggests that we can be appeased if our physical needs are met. Throughout history, 'bread and circuses' is the proven form of people control. People can be attracted and kept on board by glutting them. Promise them they will be full and safe, their taxes will be cut, and they will let you get away with anything. Admit it. This is what we want. Give it to us. If we say "I only vote on my pocketbook" we've completely succumbed to this temptation. It's all about me and what I want. Strategies of this sort are basically manipulations of our physical needs. They do not take into account the spiritual and moral dimensions of people or the gospel. This strategy is found both in personal relationships and political campaigns.

In the second temptation, Satan suggests that accusing others and dividing them from one another is the way to power and glory. Do not look at yourself or your organization as the problem. Find outside causes and accuse them of being the problem. Immigrants, outside agitators take the heat off inside scoundrels. Look out the window at the enemy, but never let the window become a mirror and look at ourselves. Also keep people fighting with one another. Thus you can do your own plundering without attracting attention. Strategies of this sort are basically clever ploys to keep you looking good and everyone else looking bad. The tempter is the primordial spin doctor and it's obvious why he is called the 'father of lies.'

In the third temptation the devil suggests that accompanying credentials are more important than the way a person actually thinks and acts. Judge and promote people by their wealth, or their fame. Show is always to be preferred to substance. Get bootlickers and spineless people with no principles to give you constant adulation. Since when should a principled person be a recommendation for anything? Strategies of this sort avoid essentials and spend their time manipulating the surfaces.

The devil did his best to seduce Jesus into using strategies that looked like they might further His ambitions. But Jesus saw them for what they were – betrayals of His true identity as the Son of God – and He refused them. It remains to be seen if we can do the same. (adapted from Shea, IBID, p. 69)