

January 27, 2013

**Scripture Lessons** *Romans 10:5-13*

*Luke 4:1-13*

**Sermon** *What to Do When You're Rubbed the Wrong Way*

Well, as he walked through his neighborhood he noticed his elderly neighbor holding an old calico cat in his lap. And he was stroking the cat gently which did not seem unusual because of those of you with cats, know they like to be stroked, and it seems to calm them down and it causes them to purr when you do. But as he got closer the man noticed that the cat was not purring but that the cat was hissing and snapping at the older man. And as the man got even closer he could finally see what the problem was with the situation. Instead of stroking from the front to the back, in the usual way, the elderly man was stroking the cat from the back to the front. Ruffling its fur and making it angry, in general, rubbing that cat the wrong way. When the man was right across from the porch he could also see that the older man was quietly whispering to the cat. And when he could understand what the neighbor was saying to the cat, he didn't know what to think. He was whispering "turn around cat, the older man was saying, turn around cat".

Today's gospel lesson speaks to us about a time when Jesus was tested by Satan in the wilderness. And there is not a one of us this morning, that has not experienced testing at one time, not one of us who has not journeyed through a wilderness of doubt, despair, sadness or sorrow. And when those times of testing come, we tend to get our backs up and we tend to get our fur ruffled a little bit like that calico cat. Often we too will hiss and snap at life when serious illness, when economic hardships, when problems with the job, when family discord come to our lives. I am here to tell you, although I really don't have to it is perfectly natural for human beings to vent our anger and to vent our frustrations at these types of situations. Hopefully we do that in constructive ways, but sometimes we don't, during the tough times that life brings our way. But I believe as God's people, we are also called after the worst of the situations have passed, to take an extra step in this process. When life brings hardships and we find ourselves, in the wilderness periods of life, just dealing with our emotions I don't think are enough. But I think we are called to deal with the things that cause our emotional distress, during such times. We are called then to examine the situations of hardship and testing very carefully and to seek some sort of meaning, some sort of understanding for our lives from those times. Again, the quote is attributed to Henry David Thoreau but somebody else said it as well. "The unexamined life is not worth living." And he was correct in the sense that it can be extremely beneficial, I think, to our growth as individuals to gain insight from each experience we encounter in life, no matter if that experience is good or that experience is difficult. The story of the man and the cat suggests then when life is rubbing us the wrong way, a helpful step beyond hissing and snapping might be to sort of turn around, and look at the problem from another perspective. Look at the problem from another angle. To see where the hope lies in the situation. What lesson or what purpose might God have for us as we face our own particular hardship or wilderness experience? After all Saint Paul reminds us in Roman's 8 to know that in everything, God works for good, with those who love God and are called according to God's purpose. And so in light of this, the story of Jesus temptation in the wilderness I think can be a great comfort and learning experience for each one of us as we journey through these weeks of lent, as we experience those wilderness times in our lives. The very fact that Jesus was human, and the very fact that he could be tested is a great comfort to me in itself when I am forced to go through such times in my life. But I think it is also important to see how Jesus baptism which occurred before his testing in the wilderness and his preaching mission which occurred after his testing, are all sort of tied together. The first thing that it tells me is that my own baptism, my own Christian

faith, don't save me from testing in life. I like Jesus, have to live in the world as it is. I have to face the reality of living in the world in which I live. But secondly it also reminds me that often to be a mature person of faith, fulfilling God's will to the best of my ability as Jesus did, we will have to experience testing from time to time. There is no way to get around it. It is also fascinating to see that in Jesus case, the same spirit that appeared at his baptism, which is the same spirit that drove him out into the wilderness. Mark says drove, Luke says led him into the wilderness to be tested. Which I think goes to show us that we are not alone in times of testing for God goes with us, and testing is not sent by God to make us fall, but this is a part of lift that God can use to strengthen us, test our mettle, and to stretch us to new and better things in life. Jesus needed to be stretched, Jesus needed to learn, Jesus needed to test himself before he could fulfill God's purpose for his life. And perhaps the same may be true of us as we walk life's path as well. There is a caveat as well of course an extremely careful thing that we must face, as we look at these things, and that is that we do not too quickly see problems and assign some easy answer, some label to them during a wilderness experience. Thereby not only judge ourselves but perhaps judge other people in the process. Nevertheless during this season of lent, when we are all the more sensitive to the love which God showed for us, as Jesus was tested on the cross. We are invited to examine the wilderness experiences of our own lives to see perhaps what good, to see perhaps what learning, to see perhaps what reward God has hidden for us in these difficult times. And so again remember these words of Saint Paul, for we know that everything God works for good for those who love him, who are called to live for God's purpose. Together we say, Amen.