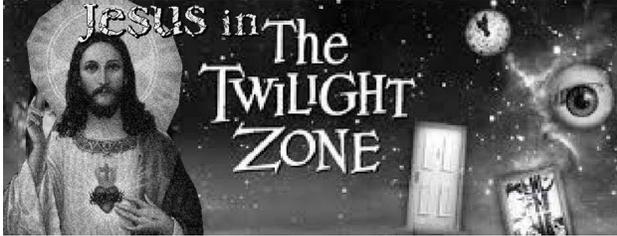


The Jesus Zone By Rev. Todd Farnsworth

Luke 4:1-13



1-2 Now Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wild. For forty wilderness days and nights he was tested by the Devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when the

time was up he was hungry. 3 The Devil, playing on his hunger, gave the first test: "Since you're God's Son, command this stone to turn into a loaf of bread." 4 Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy: "It takes more than bread to really live." 5-7 For the second test he led him up and spread out all the kingdoms of the earth on display at once. Then the Devil said, "They're yours in all their splendor to serve your pleasure. I'm in charge of them all and can turn them over to whomever I wish. Worship me and they're yours, the whole works." 8 Jesus refused, again backing his refusal with Deuteronomy: "Worship the Lord your God and only the Lord your God. Serve him with absolute single-heartedness." 9-11 For the third test the Devil took him to Jerusalem and put him on top of the Temple. He said, "If you are God's Son, jump. It's written, isn't it, that 'he has placed you in the care of angels to protect you; they will catch you; you won't so much as stub your toe on a stone?'" 12 "Yes," said Jesus, "and it's also written, 'Don't you dare tempt the Lord your God.'" 13 That completed the testing. The Devil retreated temporarily, lying in wait for another opportunity.

Luke doesn't intend us to read today's text as a literal test. He doesn't expect us to wonder at the logistics of how Jesus got from his baptism in the river to the vagueness of the wilderness. Instead Luke has posited his readers into a Twilight Zone episode. Luke uses the same dreamy and bizarre style of that series to begin Jesus' ministry and to establish where

Jesus' strength comes from. Luke offers us a collection of parables about...well, you'll soon see. As it was in the Twilight Zone, we start this sermon by invoking the holy words:

You're traveling through another dimension, a dimension not only of sight and sound but of mind. A journey into a wondrous land whose boundaries are that of imagination. That's the signpost up ahead—your next stop, the Jesus Zone!

Scene 1: IT TAKES MORE THAN A QUICK BITE TO SATISFY.

1. Oh mann, it's only the 4th day of Lent and I'm already craving chocolate!

2. (eating chocolate bunny) Did you say "chocolate"?

1. Oh yeah...I said, "chocolate."

2. Excuse me while I swallow this rich bit of chocolatey goodness. (10 seconds of over the top chewing and mmm-ing) Now, what were you saying?

1. I was saying that I gave up chocolate for Lent and I'm already craving it. It's only been 4 days!

2. But this is Sunday. You can eat chocolate on Sundays.

1. I know, I know. But I wanted to try and abstain a little longer. I mean, I thought that by delaying my gratification I might get a little closer to God.

2. Oh yeahhhh (finishes chocolate bunny, licks fingers) that's an idea.

1. That looked really good.

2. It was...and I have another one. Would you like to buy it? Only a quarter.

1. A quarter! That's cheap!

2. Just one, easy to replace, never gonna miss it, shiny quarter will get you what you want.....Look at it. (holds up candy) Mmmmmmm.

1. (Deep breath, looks up to heaven) No thanks. I think I'll try holding out a little longer. Like it says in Deuteronomy, "*It takes more than chocolate to really live!*"

Scene 2: ABSOLUTE FIDELITY

1. Hey 2!

2. Yeah, 1?

1. I heard that you were unhappy about that last vote in Congress.

2. You mean the one about...

1. ...Yes, that one. And the one before.

2. It seems so unfair. Things are really messed up, but what can I do besides vote?

1. Tell me about it. That's why I wanted to talk to you.

2. You do?

1. Yes. I wanted to tell you that I figured out how you can get your vote to carry more weight. I figured out how you can get your issues passed every single time!

2. Get outta here!

1. No, seriously. I'm working with a computer hacker who will rig the votes to tally in your favor. Every time.

You want money to go to a project? Bada Bing!

You want a new law enacted? Bada Boom!

2. It sounds incredible...and a bit illegal...and a lot unethical.

1. C'mon...you want to make the world a better place, right?

2. Right.

1. Then do what I tell you, when I tell you, and everything will be hunky dorey.

2. No more suffering?

1. Nada.

2. No more corruption?

1. Gone.

2. And all I have to do is join you in investing in these hackers?

1. That's all you have to do. Stick with me kid, and the world will be yours!

2. (pause to pray) Mmm, thanks, but no thanks. Going this illegal, unethical route with you would be against what I learn at my church. I'll place my faith in God and work a little harder to convince our leaders to do the same. I remember the Book of Deuteronomy said, "*Worship only God and serve God with absolute fidelity.*"

Scene 3: The Big D

1. Cheers! (raises a bottle and takes a swig)

2. What are you talking about?

1. Didn't you hear?

2. Hear what?

1. Someone said, "Deuteronomy." Every time someone says "Deuteronomy" you get to take a drink. Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy! Wahoooo! (takes another three swigs)

2. But why are people saying "Deuteronomy"?

1. You did it again! (drinks) I think that Deuterono--you know, *the Big D* tells stories from the Exodus...from the time when God's people were tempted in the wilderness. *The Big D* describes how people of faith failed in those temptations despite God's loving presence. I guess it's a reminder.

2. Do you mean that Deuteronomy serves as a "bookmark"?

1. (drinks) In Luke it's a (hic) Holy Bookmark! *The Big D* brings us back to our covenantal relationship with God and the ongoing challenge to do the God Thing!

2. Ohhhhh

1. Ohhhh--Hey! This has been fun but I gotta get outta here. I have to come back to sing at 3.

2. Yeah, me too. Um, how are you getting home?

1. Driving.

2. Oh, I don't think that is a good idea. You've had a lot of "Deuteronomy" this morning.

1. Cheers! You said it again! I'm fine. Jesus will get the wheel. I'll be safe.

2. I don't think that's how it works.

1. *(Stands up to leave. A little unsteady on his feet)* What are you talking about? It's only a short ride home. I'll be fine. What could go wrong? *(starts to leave by kitchen door)* I got my little friend here to help me home. I'll tell you what, you say a prayer for me and I'll see you at 3! Cheers! *(leaves)*.

Todd: Exhibit C. One Alan Pike. Fell asleep before the end of the sermon and became the punchline.

Fimi: Has anyone seen Alan? It's almost 3 and the Installation is about to start.

(Choir shakes heads NO)

Todd: Exhibit C, now on his way to the local hospital. Switched gods in mid-sip and didn't hear that Deuteronomy said, "*Don't tempt the Lord your God.*" Now in his own wilderness, he forgot that despite hunger, despite the temptation of power, Jesus was in his right mind when he trusted God

above all posers. Forgot that during Lent, there would be other temptations.

Temptations we will all have to reckon with in faith with God's help.

Temptations that will call us to, The Jesus Zone. Amen.