

Rocks!

Matthew 4:1-11

Lent 1A

FEB 10 2008

When I was sixteen my family traveled all the way from Connecticut to Ghost Ranch, a Presbyterian retreat center near Santa Fe, New Mexico. We went for a week. My parents were in a discussion group with a famous theologian. My sisters were in an arts and crafts program. And I was in a group of teens that worked in the desert all week. We had a different project each day. One day it was moving rocks in the desert to help stabilize streambeds that might erode during sudden rainstorms. Another day we went to a rest stop along a narrow road in the mountains. For fifty years travelers had stopped there and thrown their beer cans over the side of the steep cliff. Our job involved climbing up and down several hundred feet of big boulders to retrieve all of those cans and bottles in big trash bags. We filled up a large truck with all of the bags of cans and bottles we found.

All of that work in the desert moving rocks and climbing rocks was something I never imagined I would be doing when we set out on that long drive to New Mexico. I'd thought that the teen group would be spending a lot of time at the pool that week. It turned out to be a real surprise that my New Mexico vacation would involve some of the hardest work I'd ever done. We were hot and sweaty, and covered with the dust of the desert at the end of each day. The best part was what happened at the end of the week. We planned a youth worship service the last night we were there in the main hall at Ghost Ranch with all of the kids who had doing all of that hard work.

I have to tell you that this was the most amazing worship service I had ever seen. We had stage lights of different colors, even a strobe light - the first I had ever seen - but the most amazing thing was that the music we used was rock and roll. I had never seen this done - in fact I assumed that it was not allowed and would never be allowed.

But our college-aged counselors had a different idea. So when we got to the worship service it began in darkness, with one of the counselors reading the creation story in Genesis, with some soft music in the background, and then when the reader spoke "let there be light" there was light ... and more! The quiet song gave way to a loud raucous building-shaking song, as the stagelights came on and the strobe light began to pulse. It was only the Moody Blues, tame by later teen standards, but at that time we had an experience that we never expected: I never would have thought to put it this way before, but we

learned that Jesus rocks! The service ended with an invitation: are you going to hold on to what you have learned this week, about deserts, and rocks, and beer cans, and new friends, and hard work, and commitment? Everyone shouted "yes!". Jesus really rocked that night.

The devil found Jesus one day. It was a perfect opportunity. Jesus was out in the desert, surrounded by rocks, sand and dust, and he hadn't eaten in a long time. "*All it will take is a little push,*" thought the devil.

I want to borrow your car to see how fast it will go out on Rt. 262? No, you won't let me? How about if I give you 10 dollars? How about a \$100 How about \$1000? How about a million dollars? Have you ever noticed that the devil doesn't like taking NO for an answer?

And so the temptations build and build: First, look at all of these rocks., they're all over the place out here in the desert. Jesus, I bet you could turn some of them into delicious loaves of bread. No? OK, how about this? I'll carry you to the top of the Temple in Jerusalem. I bet you could jump right off and not get hurt. God would catch you before you hit the ground. The Son of God could survive that fall, but maybe you're just an imposter? I guess you'll have to prove it by jumping. Go ahead, show us what you can do. Won't do it, huh? OK, let's go to the top of this mountain. Take a look in all directions, look at every nation, and just imagine that everything you see all belongs to you. Why not, you say you're the Son of God! It's all yours, just say you want it! No? Not today? OK, I'll be back soon. Maybe you'll take me up on my offer when you see them getting out the nails for hammering you onto the cross?

The devil increases the offer each time, but each time Jesus says no, it became easier to say the next no. You know why? Each time he said no to the devil, Jesus was saying YES to God.

This part about saying YES is important. We say no, in our loneliness and it's hard. But we say YES as our witness to the presence and power of God in our life. We are surrounded by evil influences, but we persist in saying YES. Sometimes the evil influence is in us, but still we say YES to God.

In his Letter to the Romans Paul could have chosen to go on and on about how bad people are. Instead he took a different approach, showing not so much the consequences of sin, but the consequence of saying YES. Paul draws our attention to the one righteous act that sets all humankind free, the one righteous act that gives us life.

Let the actions that you take in your life this week give honor to the one act that God took in Jesus Christ that sets the world free from sin. You see, it all began when God said YES. In the nothingness God said YES and the universe began. In the face of evil, God said YES to Noah giving him the ark. In the face of injustice, God said YES to the Israelites and brought them out of Egypt to a Promised Land. In the face of an impossible obstacle, God said YES, and the walls of Jericho tumbled. In the face of defeat, God said YES and brought Jesus out of the tomb. In the face of the challenges that you face in your life, God says YES ... to you, YES to you this very day.

God began it all long ago by saying YES. God is such a living, powerful presence that God's YES continues to have the power to transform your life, by giving you the capacity, the strength, the heart, the will, the voice to say YES. No matter the evil, the sin, the injustice, the hurt, the sickness, God gives you the voice to say YES this very day, and by saying YES you have the power to begin the transformation of the entire world.

Be with us God, today and everyday. Help us to see through the temptations of our lives. Help us to see through the temptations we offer to control the freedom of others. Help us feel your presence. May our feeling of hunger be a reminder of our need for you, of our love for you. Help us to keep in our heart and mind, the model and inspiration of your son Jesus Christ. He rocks!