

**First Congregational Church of Westfield**  
**Rev Paul Nesbit**  
**February 26, 2023**

Ah, Wilderness!

What does wilderness look like for you? Perhaps it is a forest, a large plain with nothing in sight, Noble View or parts of Stanley Park. These are the places we talked about last week, as we thought about where we could be for our own quiet moments. With this in mind, though, another thought came to me during the week. The nighttime can be wilderness for us as well.

Do you remember when you were little or young and the mystery that surrounded the middle of the night? I had no idea what happened in the middle of the night. I do remember having to use the bathroom and being very afraid of my father snoring. I used to block my ears and run into the bathroom. There is probably some psychotherapist chomping to get at that one! But I digress. The nighttime can still be a wilderness for me, especially living on water.

As we grow older, many of us have dealt with insomnia or the inability to fall asleep or to be woken out of a sound sleep. Maybe we ate or drank something that didn't agree with us or something is going on in our lives that causes our brain to wake us. It can be aggravating, annoying, scary, or just a burden. What do you do when you wake up at 3am and you cannot go back to sleep?

People have suggested warm milk, read a book, or to watch TV. Sometimes the TV is too stimulating for me and only makes me more awake. I have found the same thing with the computer. Sometimes I can watch a video on my phone or listen to some music. Sometimes I will take myself out of bed and move to a different part of the house to see if that works. In the

summer, I would like to think that I would go outside and see what was happening by the pond, but I am afraid of what wild animals the dog and I would encounter at 3:00am.

A friend of mine who has since passed away one time shared with me that she would make a “holy hour” whenever she found she could not go back to sleep. She would sit in her chair and pray, not just to return to sleep, but wondering just like the child Samuel, if God was calling her to do something or if she could be missing some sort of a message. I have tried to use that in my own life as of late. Especially when the “demons” of my life want to come into action.

Everyone’s definition of “demons” can be different. Some demons tempt while others try to knock us down. How many of us have lied awake at night thinking about or cringing about something that happened forty or fifty years ago? Something we did in the fifth grade? Maybe some unwise decision was made when parenting or teaching early on in that process. They all seem to come flooding back at that point, don’t they? Sometimes our “demons” are more in the present; how am I going to pay that bill? Will my spouse be healthy? What is going to happen to my things if I get sick? How am I going to get rid of the snow on Tuesday?

As we read in today’s gospel from Matthew, we read that Jesus himself was tempted by demons. As we come to know him as truly God and truly human, we are able to grasp how he is able to overcome temptation and give us words to live by in 2023. “One does not live by bread alone.” “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” “Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.”

I am not sure if you pay attention to our Facebook “ads” but the one for this week mentioned the need for a balanced spiritual diet. As we don’t live by bread alone, we must learn to balance not only our nutritional diet but our spiritual diet as well. We must continue find ways to carve out time for prayer as a means to provide balance in our lives.

Ok, God, if you just give me this or provide an answer for that, then I will...talk about putting God to the test! Or, if I don't take the help that is offered but still expect God to help me, then what will happen at that point? It is almost like the old joke when the guy is jumping out of the plane and dies. "God, why didn't you help me?" God answers, "Why didn't you pull the string on your parachute?" We have our own ways of putting God to the test; my suggestion is that we stop doing that and take advantage of what has been put into place for us. We have all kinds of resources to assist us in so many areas of our lives. Let's use them!!

And, finally, we have heard the scripture reading that you cannot serve two gods or numerous gods. We cannot put other thing in a place of more importance than God in our lives. Many of us have tried, and I believe we have found that it just doesn't work. Sometimes it happens on an "eventual" sense, but it usually happens. Much like the first hearers of Matthew's gospel, we are called to be "monotheistic" which means to worship only one God.

The season of Lent isn't just for Catholics but a chance for ALL Christians to reflect on their relationship with God and their role as co-worker to bring about the Reign of God on earth. As we continue to pray, fast, and give alms throughout the next 5 to 6 weeks, let us be mindful of our wilderness times and how we can come out into the world full of the goodness of God.