



**“DIG DEEP”**  
**SCRIPTURE: PSALM 91: 1-2, 9-16; LUKE 4: 1-13**  
**GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC**  
**March 10, 2019**  
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**Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16**

91:1 You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,

91:2 will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust."

91:9 Because you have made the LORD your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place,

91:10 no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.

91:11 For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

91:12 On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.

91:13 You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.

91:14 Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name.

91:15 When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them.

91:16 With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation.

**Luke 4:1-13**

4:1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness,

4:2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished.

4:3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread."

4:4 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

4:5 Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the

world.

4:6 And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please.

4:7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."

4:8 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

4:9 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here,

4:10 for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,'

4:11 and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

4:12 Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

4:13 When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

The Word of the LORD.

**Thanks be to God.**

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Of all the tasks that have been before me in my adult life, perhaps the one that demanded the most of me was motivating eighty sixth, seventh, and eighth graders to push themselves through pain and discomfort to finish a 2-mile race.

And perhaps none of the work I have done in my adult life has been more rewarding than watching those 80 middle school boys and girls discover the strength and capability they have within themselves to keep going when it is hard.

The cross country season always began with a lot of creative excuses brought to me as a coach about why running that day wasn't going to be possible—forgotten shoes, too much homework, allergies, a sore toe, an injury in gym class, too hot, too cold, stomach ache, shin splints. Runners knew I wasn't going to spend much time on excuses.

"The less you put into this, the less you will get out of it. The more reasons you find not to run, the harder running will be. I know you can do it. When are you going to realize you can do it?"

At the same time I would remind runners, “I am not in your body. Only you can know your own body. Only you can tell the difference between true pain that needs your attention and discomfort that requires your bravery.”

The beautiful thing about running cross country is that there are so many ways to win—you can better your time, you can walk less, you can outrun an opponent, you can push yourself up hills, you can run faster at the finish, you can resist the temptation to quit.

Every practice after a meet we would celebrate all those kinds of victories: personal best times, top finishers, goals achieved. But my favorite thing to do the day after a meet was to give out the “Dig Deep Award.” This award went to the runner who had to overcome something in the race, the runner who showed the team what it means to dig deep inside ourselves and find out what we can do.

The runner who ran in honor of her grandmother who died the day before. The runner who was knocked down at the starting line and got up and clawed his way back from last place to finish in the middle of the pack. The runner who lost a shoe in the mud and ran the rest of the race with one shoe. The runner who felt like quitting, but instead of quitting crossed the finish line in last place.

The inscription on the award: “It’s not cross country if you don’t dig deep.”

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We could also say: “It’s not Christianity if you don’t dig deep.”

Jesus isn’t calling us to go on a pleasure cruise or leisurely walk in the park. The journey of faith is not about faith at all if you aren’t challenged, if you don’t go through some dark nights of the soul.

And facing those shadows calls on the same self-knowledge on our parts. Only you are in your body; only you know the difference between pain that needs your attention and discomfort that requires your bravery.

Just a few days in to our Lenten journey for 2019, Jesus takes us into the wilderness with him.

Luke’s version has the devil tempting Jesus after 40 days alone, in the tumult of the wilderness, with no food. Jesus was exhausted, famished, and vulnerable.

So that’s the first thing we need to get straight about digging deep—it’s not about getting through something when we’re strong, when we’re ready for the challenge, when we have a plan in place, when our gas tank is full, when we have all the support we need, when we feel competent and on top of our game.

Digging deep comes in a more barren place—in a place of deprivation, isolation, even desperation.

It's not really faith if you don't dig deep.

What does it mean if your faith is only something that defines you in the best of times? What does it mean if following Jesus is only something you do when it's convenient, comfortable, or the socially acceptable thing to do?

The harsh truth about faith is clear in the wilderness of Jesus finding his Messianic identity—faith is about disrupting the powers and principalities, faith is about one's core identity truly being that you are God's very own, faith is about letting your identity as God's own lead the way when another way is presenting and it is truly enticing.

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### Temptation #1

3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread."

All three of these temptations are backlit by the Messianic expectations of Jesus's and Luke's generations. They were looking for a Messiah to overthrow Rome. They were looking for a Messiah to reestablish the kingdom of Israel. They were looking for a Messiah to purify the cultic life of Judaism.

They projected all of these things onto Jesus—they saw what they wanted to see. They loaded him down with expectations for what they thought their world needed.

And right out the gate the devil tempts Jesus perform the kind of sign that people would eat like candy, and to perform that sign to benefit himself.

If Jesus had been ego-driven, if Jesus had been a narcissist, if Jesus had just been the least bit given to needing a lot of external affirmation, if Jesus had just a little drop of insecurity...

If Jesus thought for even a minute that he was a free agent, that he was independent from God...

The devil's offer would have been very hard to resist.

Yes, Jesus was hungry, and he was also human... and Jesus also had a clear line of access to a deep kind of trust in God to provide. His physical needs would not compromise his identity. And his identity in God made his answer clear.

4:4 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

Nothing could take away Jesus's identity in God—not hunger, not disappointed crowds, not hostile rulers, not a manipulative force trying to undermine his ministry.

Digging deep takes knowing who you are, and where your true spiritual food comes from—it comes from God and the world can't take it away.

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## Temptation #2

4:5 Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.

4:6 And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please.

4:7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."

The devil ups the ante—and gives Jesus a clear path to one of the most successful and time-tested human strategies for access to power—opportunism.

The devil gives Jesus a chance to compromise his principles to get more power. The temptation of letting one's principles be malleable enough to prioritize power over commitment to God's lessons and God's love—we could never have enough time to count the number of human beings who have taken the bait on such an offer.

I dare say our whole country was built on such a deal with the devil—opportunism only works when one's principles are malleable enough to be bought if the price is high enough.

The lies the US Government told First Nation people in the treaties they knew they would never honor; the nonsensical and ridiculous ideas presidents and scientists and theologians and every day people just like you and me came up with to justify chattel slavery, the financial gains people have accumulated from knowingly poisoning people and the planet—all of these opportunistic decisions are foundational to our way of life as Americans. The siren song of profit, of power can steal our morality and whole institutions and cultures don't bat an eye.

And it seems many of our political officials today have solved the problem of having to compromise their principles by just not having any principles at all. Their political calculus is about relevance, popularity, funding, access to power—principles be damned.

How often do we give in to the temptation to be successful instead of faithful?

But Jesus digs deep into that God-centered place that knows full well no authority can trump God's authority. As enticing as power is, God's power is the only power that can truly give us true abundant life.

"It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

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### Temptation #3

4:9 Then the devil took Jesus to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here,

4:10 for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,'

4:11 and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

The third temptation has the devil himself going to scripture to shore up his offer. Jesus is an observant Jew. Every answer he has given to the devil has been straight from Deuteronomy. The devil appropriates the authority of scripture to try and get Jesus to cave in—daring Jesus to show the devil the depth of Jesus' trust in God by showing the world just what God can do.

Have you ever been tempted to use your religious tradition for personal gain? Have you ever worn your faith on your sleeve to gain some advantage? This might be a harder one for us to feel convicted by, but think about it for a minute.

We are not above twisting our faith, our religious traditions to serve our needs—making God in our own image, conveniently avoiding the hard parts of what our faith demands to remain comfortable in relationships, in community.

How often have you remained silent when your faith calls you to speak up? When someone says something that is racist, that is hateful, that is homophobic, that is demeaning to someone you care about. Choosing comfort over justice, choosing being nice over being in solidarity with oppressed people, testing God's grace with our stubborn refusal to take a risk in the face of wrong—these are ways we twist our faith to serve our needs.

We test God not by throwing ourselves into the arms of angels; we test God by taking the easy road and banking on God giving us a pass. We test God by exempting ourselves from accountability and then still trying to claim the moral high ground.

4:12 Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

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There are lots of excuses we can all make about why we can't give our whole lives to being Jesus followers. We live in stressful times—and the stakes feel pretty high just about every day. But Lent is about taking a hard look at ourselves—it's about practicing again what it is we preach— aspiring to new habits of life and mind and heart.

But, just like cross country season, the Lenten season begins with a lot of creative excuses about why practicing our faith isn't going to be possible for us right now—too busy, too many physical needs, too distracted, too afraid, too unsure, too comfortable.

And I can say the same thing to this beloved community that I said to the cross country team I coached: “The less you put into this, the less you will get out of it. The more reasons you find not to practice, the harder practicing will be. I know you can do it. When are you going to realize you can do it?”

If you put God at the center of who you are and why you are here on earth and what you are capable of, then the challenges we are facing in our nation, in our community, in our own lives are not impossible for us to face—they are our very purpose in life. And being fully alive means we cannot but rise up and follow Jesus into the most difficult challenges of our day.

Dig Deep, GCPC, and discover what you're made of—find the strength that God has given you to keep going when it's hard:

- Have that difficult discussion about a bully in your workplace.
- Stand in solidarity with those who are being harmed by our systems of oppression.
- Put some more of your own skin, your own resources, your own heart and soul into the work of dismantling white supremacy in your spheres of influence.

Take the risk and be vulnerable and trust God's power to provide in the most barren places of our lives.

After all, it's not following Jesus if you don't dig deep.

Thanks be to God.