

Jesus Leads the Way

Deuteronomy 26:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13 | First Sunday in Lent | March 9, 2025 | Pastor John Klawiter, preaching

Grace and peace to you my friends in Christ,

The Community Resource Fair—this inaugural event we’ve been building up for months, was finally here! It felt like Christmas morning—and the gifts (PICTURE of stuff) under the tree were all of the food, clothing, resource booths, and kids activities that you’ve donated or helped collect.

Santa’s elves were donned in blue shirts (SLIDE of Faith volunteers)—Faith volunteers that were here all day, and the day before, and did so much work to get us ready.

It was the day after Ash Wednesday—a kickoff to the season of Lent. To share our faith with our community and live out the mission of Christ to love our neighbors.

It’s like the reading from Deuteronomy—hopefully a new ritual of giving back. As Hebrew Bible teacher Timothy McNinch put it:

“Deuteronomy 26 prescribes a bit of land-based liturgical theater for the Israelites. Each year, when the harvest begins, farmers are told to gather a basket full of the first-fruits of the harvest to present to God at the place of worship.

Just as in the Ash Wednesday tradition, specific lines of dialogue are given to these farmer-worshippers to recite. First, they are to declare that they are immigrants—that they have come to the land as outsiders. This is strange, because the text imagines that this ritual would be performed by each generation, annually. Even farmers who had been born in the land, whose grandparents and great-grandparents had been born in the land, are asked to declare for themselves, “I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us.”

This isn’t MY stuff. It’s not MY land. It’s not MY money. It came from OUR Creator. It is something WE inherited to be stewards of. This is what it means to live Biblically. Or at least TRY to.

McNinch said, “A celebration of the fruit of the land risked excluding those who did not possess ancestral land, Therefore, the text demands that these important, but vulnerable, community members must be sought out and included in the festivities.”

Sermon Transcript

How cool is that? They actually established a ritual to make sure, even generations later, that the accumulation of possessions always pointed back to others.

This Community Resource Fair was our chance—from longtime members to people brand new to our church—to include the most vulnerable members of our community—to invite them to the party.

It was 8:30 am. Everything was set. The greeters and booths were in place (picture of volunteers). We waited for the rush.

So, the question is... we gave back, who would walk through the doors and receive this offering?

I think this video of a Boy Scout leader speaking to a congregation is a great example of what we prepared for.

VIDEO

The doors opened and people started to come in (SLIDE of people shopping). Nobody with orange hair, but we were willing to take people as they are.

Each person was guided to places of need.

About 10 minutes in, if I'm being honest, I started feeling discouraged.

I was expecting hundreds of neighbors to walk through that door (point towards door 6). That we'd have a line waiting to get in.

You know that voice in your head, the one that says you messed up? You didn't do enough? Are people gonna get angry or mad?

Yeah, that voice was getting louder.

I was worried that our volunteers would feel like they'd done all this work and it wasn't worth it. I thought all of our vendors would think that this was a waste of time. I started to worry people would assume that there weren't really people with needs, that we were overreacting.

Try as hard as I could, I couldn't stop those feelings from creeping in. You ever feel that way?

You know, it's tempting to hear the story of Jesus in the wilderness (JESUS IN WILDERNESS) like we do on the first Sunday of Lent every year and make a case that this is one of those "What would Jesus Do" stories.

Sermon Transcript

We believe that since Jesus resisted the testing of the devil, we must do it too.

Hungry during Lent? What would Jesus do—he wouldn't eat that chocolate. He wouldn't have a burger on Friday.

The thing is, that's only ONE of the tests that the devil gives to Jesus.

The other two involve power or authority and the last one is about immortality—safety. We don't really try to pass those "tests", do we?

It's harder to ask "what would Jesus do?" because, we don't really like to think about our desire for power and immortality as a test or temptation. Those virtues get celebrated in society.

We're expected to crave power. To want all the credit. Who will even notice if take a few short-cuts to get ahead.

We justify those actions, even though we know it's not true.

Are we asking ourselves, would Jesus do THAT? Not usually. We are guilty. Tempted by greed and easily overlooking when we put ourselves ahead of others. The devil thinks he's got us.

And he's right—when the devil puts us to the test, we can't possibly resist like Jesus does.

Thank God for Jesus. Because of Jesus, we have the grace to know that it's not on us to be perfect. It's not our job to resist all the tests and temptations that the devil puts before us.

Because of Jesus, we have the cross to remind us that the devil doesn't get the last word. That we have "Jesus superpowers" to get us through the test.

On Thursday, I was grateful for that reminder.

Midmorning, my attitude changed as I started to walk around and talk to people. Watching Chrissie Lee, from Community Helping Hands, as she'd excitedly work her networks—calling landlords, getting the word out. Come and see!

Vendors started posting on their social media pages about how they loved what Faith was doing! Members of Faith tagged the event on their walls and starting dialogue.

Word was starting to spread... and people came!

Sermon Transcript

It didn't amount to hundreds, but for the 60 adults who were served—and many bringing kids—they had access to resources that they wouldn't normally have. They were thrilled to be able to get food, gas cards, clothes and supplies. Each person who entered walked out with dignity, resources, and blessing.

But it didn't stop there. I also started hearing from the vendors. They quickly reminded us that the first time that Stillwater hosted one of these—and they are the hub of activity—they only had 100 people. They said word of mouth will spread about what's happening here at Faith.

The vendors loved connecting with other vendors. They told me about the resources that they learned and the business cards and connections that they made.

County Commissioner Fran Miron came. He remembered Faith from the Tiny House advocacy. He was thrilled to see what we were doing—he wanted me to tell you to keep it up. That we have his full support.

One lady represented the Catholic church in Stillwater and she commented on how many great ideas she was taking away from how organized our event was and the intentionality for kids activities. She said that what we did will go into effect for THEIR future events.

But the most amazing comment I heard came from person after person.

It was about the hospitality of Faith. From the set-up and willingness to put out stuff. From the food that was delivered throughout the morning on trays—it wasn't something they were used to, you made each person feel welcomed, cared for, and provided them hope.

Everyone talked about how big the NEXT one will be.

And, remembering how that desire to serve a larger crowd tested me, that's NOT the reason to do it.

The reason to do it again is because it's important work. It's Spirit-filled, holy work. This is our way of filling people up with Jesus—of loving people as they are.

It's Lent everyone. These 40 days started with a humbling reminder to put Jesus Christ first. Literally.

Jesus leads the way. That's what Jesus does. Amen.