Ever since I was a boy I have been terrified of both the wilderness and attics. Truth be told, I still kind-of am! In my pre-kindergarten years, we lived in a 3 story home in Boston. My bedroom had a door in it that led to one more flight of steps into the attic. That door terrified me. To make matters much worse, my brother had put a sticker of a Lizard-man on that door that really did me in. Sure enough, one night it all comes to a head. I fall asleep, I dream the lizard-man comes down from the attic, picks me up out of bed and takes me downstairs as I’m screaming. He then opens the outside door to take me away never to be seen again. Just then My mother, my sweet mother! comes running from the kitchen with apron on, knife in hand, and yells: Have him back in time for dinner! True dream! Betrayed by my own mother! Ohh, I hate attics. I can’t be the only one!
Attics, like our hearts, can be dark, lifeless, scary playgrounds of mice and critters. Where all those things once new, are now stored for another day that will probably never come:

- Memories that make you cry
- Memories in old photo albums and home movies that speak to joy,
- but maybe unresolved relationships,
- unforgivenesses,
- regrets?

Who could forget actor Chevy Chase in Christmas Vacation going teary eyed through all those home movies, and then falling through the attic floor.

Attics force us to look back, and in a way can serve as a metaphor for Lent. Lent, a 40 day season of self-examination. Or like in AA, Lent is Step-10: “Take personal inventory, admit the wrongs!” A season where we take a deep breath, open the door of our attic soul to take inventory and begin cleaning. For some that are more efficient, you’re only dealing with things from the last 12 months. Others might be looking at 20 and 30 years of things to throw and keep. This is Lent, my friends.

And Jesus knows all about this season. I find today’s Gospel reading so powerful because in 5 sweeping verses,

- Jesus is baptized to start His ministry..
- The Holy Spirit descends on Him...
- And bam…the door hits him on his rear as he’s sent into the attic, the wilderness.

If you remember nothing else from this sermon, remember that Jesus doesn’t choose to go into the attic wilderness. Verse 12, Jesus is driven into that wilderness by the Holy Spirit!

What was that wilderness like? For those who have been to Israel, you know the wilderness is:

- Barren
- Rocky
- Gravelly
- dusty...
- Freezing at night
- hot during the day.
- Not a wilderness of lush green grass and flowing streams.

No a barren unforgiving land, like the bare bones badlands of the Dakotas.

What makes it even more terrifying is that Jesus is not alone! Verse 13, Satan is tempting Jesus and wild beasts surround him. Wild beasts like panthers, bears, wolves, hyenas, and lions.

Does it take your breath a way a bit? Mark 1 makes it clear that the life of Jesus is no prosperity Gospel! That Satan is real and not symbolic, and that Jesus is tested, and tormented in every way as we are BUT DID NOT GIVE IN!

- Can you feel that hot sun,
- Can you feel that cold wind?
- Can you feel the eyes of the Hyena on you?

2. Attic Time
It may have been just about now in the wilderness that Jesus quotes David from Psalm 22: “My God my God, why have you forsaken me! I cry out but I don’t hear an answer; at night I have no rest.” But why? Why was the wilderness needed? Why couldn’t Jesus be baptized, and go right into healing and saving people? Because Jesus is modeling for us one of the chief principles of Scripture: the role of wilderness time. Before any ministry, even during ministry, we have to have our insides cleaned out! We have to hit that internal re-set button.

Wilderness time is where we come face to face with our own
- Frailties
- fragilities
- sin,
- weaknesses
- and realize only God can get us through
  - Where we are broken of our own self-sufficiency
  - Where we recognize God will lead us through temptation
  - Where we come out with a radical dependence on Jesus
This is Lent. This is Wilderness time.

What would it be like to spend 40 days and 40 nights in your attic? Imagine your headed up to put one more box in the attic-whistling as you climb those steps when..CLICK..someone has locked the door from the outside. And you had to spend 40 days and nights in spiritual warfare like Jesus did. And not just the warfare, but with wild beasts. Perhaps not hyenas or lions, but beasts in the form of your past in dusty boxes.
- Over there, the beast of boxes marked
  o guilt
  o unforgiveness
  o and regret
- In another corner, a plastic dust covered wardrobe
  o marked anger
- Over there, another box
  o marked sadness, photos of a beloved no longer here…
- there’s no escaping it here-
- there is nothing you can do but call on Jesus!

It reminds me of Corrie ten Boom, a woman whose family hid the Jews from the Nazis, who upon reflecting on such a time said: You may never know Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have. That’s the purpose of wilderness/attic time. So that, after 40 Days, we come out to the Easter Resurrection! Singing alleluia because Jesus and Only Jesus could redeem every part of our lives!
My friends, without that attic/wilderness time, we become

- Self-sufficient
- Unrepentant
- Lords of our own lives
- And that’s when disaster hits.

Oh these past 9 days have been personally painful for me as I think about my friend, teacher, and mentor, that powerful Christian Defender and Author, Ravi Zacharias. A man who taught me so much about uncompromising truth. Ravi developed a World-Wide ministry that transformed so many lives. Ravi preached here at St. Michael’s several times, including a wedding with me here for two St. Michaelites. Ravi died of cancer at age 74, and at the time was one of the most revered defenders of the faith in the United States. But much to our horror, it was just made known that Ravi was living a destructive double life, the likes of which make you want to weep. The news has been devastating, not just for his ministry, but for those he hurt in the process. I’m not here to tell you how it all unfolded in Ravi’s life, I don’t know!

All I can say is that without that attic-wilderness-reset where we pray: Lord, break the power of sin and self-sufficiency, examine my life, expose my sins. Develop my muscle to refuse temptation. Re-set me in a right relationship with you and others! Shut me in Lord to set me straight, let me never be walking away from you! And Bring me to a place of radical dependence.

My friends, we need wilderness time not only for greater dependence on Jesus, but to reject and repel Satan as Jesus did! Why? Because Satan has a strategy. Satan wants to tempt you into thinking:

- you have to keep those things in the attic…
- Your past defines you
- You can’t do a thing about them.
- Don’t bother bringing those things down
- don’t bother dealing with them, you are condemned for ever.
- It’s why Satan the name means condemner!

Satan needs you to keep those things in your attic so he can maintain control over you. Your attic is Satan’s leverage. If he can keep it there, he can keep you spiritually dead.

Okay, this has been a heavier than expected sermon. Let me give you good news. In the 40 day wilderness, it wasn’t just Jesus, Satan and a bunch of teeth clenchin, four legged critters. There is another entity in the wilderness! In the very last part of verse 13, we find the angels helping Jesus! Jesus was not on His own in that wilderness! I imagine zillions of angels, like a holy entourage with Jesus, ministering to Him!
My friends, in that attic of your life, you are not alone! You don’t have to do this by yourself. With angels, archangels and all the company of heaven! You are not alone! Your clergy are also here to walk with you. The reality is those boxes of guilt, regret, and sin will only disappear when you confess that problem, and some of the boxes too big for you to carry alone. It’s why you have a card online and in your pew saying we will go into that attic with you, to help you fight off those demons, to help you clear them out, so you would be forgiven and free! Don’t you want that freedom! And not just that freedom but wilderness/attic time will prepare you for a new ministry as it did for Jesus!

So, finally today, would you turn in your bulletin to page 2? Look at both pictures there, and answer this question. Which picture currently resembles your heart? The cluttered attic picture with all that muckity muck, or the beautiful attic turned into a bedroom? Here’s the kicker. The Lord wants that attic of your heart cleaned out so he can use it for living space! From the dark dinginess to a beautiful light-filled room of joy! Boxes and boxes of guilt, regret and angst GONE! God needs that space, that room so you can entertain...a missionary! Have the Holy Spirit given courage to enter that attic wilderness, and know Jesus will meet you there.