

## **Lent 1 March 1 2020**

### **Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7- Matthew 4:1-11**

I changed a couple of things in our reading. The first was the addition of the word “Then” to the first verse. I did that, because it is there in the NRSV, “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”

Something happened just before this temptation. So, what was that? Well, let’s go back to chapter 3. We’ve been here before, but it has been awhile back- December 8 of last year (during Advent) and January 12 (Baptism of Our Lord) this year.

John the Baptist has appeared in the wilderness of Judea baptizing and proclaiming “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near.” He speaks of one who is more powerful than he who is coming. Then Jesus came from Galilee to be baptized by John. When Jesus was baptized and just coming up out of the water the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and resting upon him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

Then.....

With that proclamation of his identity as the Son of God still ringing in his ears, with the water still dripping from his clothes, that same Spirit leads Jesus away from the river and deeper into the wilderness. The same place where the Israelites went after being named by God as God’s own people. After being “saved” by passing through the waters of the Red Sea. The wilderness, the place where they wandered for 40 years, trusting only in God’s word to them- of who

they were, that God would provide for and protect them, that God was leading them through the wilderness to the promised land of abundance.

And it is here in the wilderness, after fasting for 40 days, that Jesus is met by the tempter. What is at stake for Jesus is whether he will trust in his just revealed identity as Son of God and all that comes with that- trust in God, or if Jesus will trust in something else- himself or even the tempter.

Now we come to the second change I made. I agree with the commentators who think it is better to translate the word the tempter uses as “Since” rather than “If”. That matches better how the tempter works. Rarely does the tempter push back directly at something. Rather, the tempter pushes at our understanding of what it means. The tempter doesn’t deny that Jesus is the Son of God, he’s tempting Jesus to define that in his way rather than trust in God.

“Since you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” The tempter is a crafty devil. Now, on the face of it- there is nothing that wrong with this request- is there? Jesus is hungry from 40 days of fasting. What harm is there in making use of those powers to feed himself?

It is an echo of the thinking of Adam and Eve in the text from Genesis- the fruit of the tree is good for food...

Unlike Adam and Eve- Jesus refuses to take the bait and he quotes scripture to rebuff the tempter, “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3. The immediate context of the quote is a reference to the 40 years of Israel’s wandering in the wilderness. It is God who has promised to (and did) feed the

Israelites with manna and quail. What Jesus is saying is, I don't need to create food, because I trust God will provide. Does his trust bear fruit?

Adam and Eve are tempted to eat- even though they have a whole garden filled with food that God has said, "Eat all you like". But note how the tempter works on them, undermining their confidence in God. Directing them to the one thing God has said they should not do- rather than the abundance, the freedom, God has given them.

The tempter then takes Jesus to the holy city of Jerusalem, the highest peak of the Temple- the very seat of God on earth. "Since you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, after all, doesn't the Bible say in Psalm 91, God's angels will take care of you?" Again, on the face of it, there's nothing wrong with this, is there? I mean why not test the GFCI outlet? At worst, it's like bungy jumping from a bridge? You know you'll be okay so why not give it a go?

Another echo of Adam and Eve- if you eat that forbidden fruit, you won't die.

Jesus however, declines, quoting scripture right back at the tempter. "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." That's Deuteronomy 6:16.

Finally, the tempter takes Jesus to a high mountain and shows him the kingdoms of the world and says, "All this is yours, if you will worship me". Like everything before, there is nothing wrong with power. Imagine what good you could do if you had absolute political power! You could feed people, make a difference!

It is an echo of Adam and Eve- the tempter says to them- you won't die, God is just worried about having rivals for God's own power. Eat this, and you'll know what God knows. Having undermined Adam and Eve's confidence in God, the

serpent then invites them to establish themselves -- craft their own identity -- independent of their relationship with God: Who needs God, after all, when you can be “like God” all on your own? And they fall for the serpent’s ploy, they attempt to define themselves apart from God but end up only defining themselves over and against each other. Their actions don’t lead to a better life, but one that takes them away from the abundance that God had created for them.

Jesus responds to the tempter with a command, “Get out of here” and then again quotes Deuteronomy 6:13, “Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.”

It’s important to note the context of Deuteronomy 6-8 that Jesus quotes in his responses. It is the moment where the Israelites are just about in the promised land and Moses is giving them warnings about forgetting that it is God who provides, who got them to this land of plenty.

The temptation is to forget that God is God and we are not. To forget that everything we have belongs to God, comes from God. We didn’t earn or create it.

Just a little later in Chapter 8- the warning will come (11-18) After you have entered this land, when you have built fine houses, eaten your fill, increased your flocks and your monetary wealth- don’t pat yourself on the back and forget God (who brought you out of slavery in Egypt, who led you successfully through the wilderness for 40 years, made water flow from a rock to quench your thirst, fed you, every day, with manna- enough for everyone to be filled) so don’t say to yourself “My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.” But remember the Lord your God, for it is God who provides the abundance that fills your belly. It is God who guides you through the wilderness to safety, it is

God who is in charge. So, trust in God and worship only God the source of all things.

The temptation that lies before us all the time is a question of identity. Of who and whose we are? Of who we trust.

In his book *A Daring Promise*, Richard Gaillardetz believes that the story of Adam and Eve is suggesting that our desire to be utterly independent is manifestation of sinfulness. This is what the tempter places before us- that we know better-that we can do God's work of taking care of ourselves and creation better than God can. That we don't have to rely on anyone but ourselves.

We like this, because the alternative is to be vulnerable. To admit our dependence upon God- the source of all that is. To be vulnerable- opening ourselves up to each other and recognizing our inter-dependence. To love one another as God calls us to love-means being vulnerable. As anyone who has loved another knows- to love is to risk. Hurt, pain, but also unimaginable joy and comfort.

Where are the places in our lives where that voice of the tempter comes to us and whispers- you know better than God? Did God really say to spend the Sabbath in rest and praise of God? Hey, you can do that at home, right? Did God say to feed the hungry? Hey, fill your pantry first then you can send something- after all, how can you help if you're in want?

This is the voice of the tempter, it sounds reasonable- it doesn't really call us to anything that we would obviously see as wrong. And it inevitably leads us to trust something or someone other than God.

Our salvation lies in the fact that Jesus does claim the title of Son of God as defined by God: dedicating himself to the healing, liberating, challenging, nonviolent and merciful mission that is God's will for God's people. Jesus does this emphatically "Get out of here!" And his trust bears fruit, for the angels serve him, granting Jesus all he needs.

And it is through Jesus' death- because we could not risk being vulnerable, because we would rather kill God than depend on God- and Jesus' resurrection- God's love and power are greater than anything else- that we are saved.

When Martin Luther felt oppressed by his conscience, plagued by doubt, fear, insecurity, when he was tempted- he would cry out loud- mimicking Jesus on the high mountain, "Away with you Satan, I am baptized!"

And this is our salvation, when we are suffering in those same ways, and perhaps when we recognize the voice of the tempter – that oh so reasonable voice that is calling us to trust in something or someone other than God- especially ourselves. To cry, "Away with you Satan, I am a baptized child of God- raised into new life by the death and resurrection of Jesus and I shall trust in the one who has fearfully and wonderfully made me. I shall trust in the one who is the source of all that shelters and protects, of the food and drink that sustain me. I shall trust in the one who loves me so much that God sent Jesus- who in dying and rising has set me free forever from your lies."

If we but trust in Jesus, Son of God- it shall bear much glorious fruit.