

SUNDAY, MARCH 6, 2022

LENT 1 C, LUKE 4:1-13

WHEN MY 21 YEAR-OLD WAS ABOUT 3, SHE WAS OUR RESIDENT THEOLOGIAN. IF ANYONE ASKED HER WHAT WAS BAPTISM, SHE WOULD TELL THEM ADOPTION, AND IF THEY ASKED WHAT WAS ADOPTION, SHE WOULD TELL THEM BAPTISM.

SO, IT WAS NO SURPRISE WHEN WE GOT HOME ONE SUNDAY AFTER CHURCH AND SHE CAME AND SNUGGLED IN MY LAP. SHE PULLED MY HEAD DOWN AND WHISPERED IN MY EAR, "HEY MOM, WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE DEVIL?" WELL THE PASTOR MIND IN ME WANTED TO TELL HER ALL ABOUT EVIL AND TEMPTATION, BUT FORTUNATELY MY MOM MIND KICKED IN, AND I REMEMBERED THAT SHE WAS 3, SO I LOOKED HER IN THE EYE AND ASKED "WHAT DO **YOU** KNOW ABOUT THE DEVIL?"

HER RESPONSE WAS VERY INSTRUCTIVE TO THIS PASTOR-MOM. "WELL," SHE SAID, "THE DEVIL TALKED TO JESUS." Hmm – SHE'S BEEN PAYING ATTENTION IN SUNDAY SCHOOL – THAT'S GOOD.

"THE DEVIL WAS ALSO MEAN," SHE WHISPERED. "MEAN".

THAT GOT ME TO WONDERING ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEAN AND EVIL.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE? WAS THE DEVIL REALLY MEAN? MAYBE IT'S POSSIBLE TO BE MEAN WITHOUT BEING EVIL, BUT IS THE OPPOSITE TRUE? IS IT POSSIBLE TO BE EVIL WITHOUT BEING MEAN? MY WANDERING THOUGHTS WERE SOON CUT SHORT AS SHE LEANED IN EVEN CLOSER AND SAID,

"IF I WAS IN MY ROOM, AND YOU AND DAD WERE OUT IN THE LIVING ROOM, AND BEKAH WAS AT HER FRIENDS HOME, AND THERE WAS CANDY IN HER ROOM, THE DEVIL WOULD SAY, YOU SHOULD TAKE SOME."

I'M NOT SURE WHAT WAS MORE STARTLING – THE FACT THAT MY 3 YEAR-OLD COULD RETELL OUR GOSPEL FOR TODAY WITH SUCH DRAMA, OR THE FACT THAT THERE WAS SUCH EMPHASIS ON THE TEMPTATION AND THE PERSONAL TEMPTER.

I WONDER JUST HOW MUCH THIS LITTLE CHILD OF MINE REALLY UNDERSTOOD. SO I ASKED HER,

“HANNAH,” IF DAD AND I WERE IN ANOTHER ROOM, AND BEKAH WAS AT HER FRIEND’S AND YOU WERE IN YOUR ROOM AND THERE WAS CANDY, AND THE DEVIL SAID, YOU SHOULD TAKE SOME,” WHAT WOULD YOU SAY BACK TO THE DEVIL?”

AND THAT WONDERFUL SMILE OF HERS LIT UP HER ENTIRE FACE AND WITHOUT HESITATION, SHE REPLIED, “OH, I WOULD SAY THANK YOU.”

IT’S NOT SURPRISING THAT A 3-YEAR-OLD WOULD MISS THE POINT, BUT SO MANY OF US MISS THE POINT ALL THE TIME. IT IS FAR EASIER THAN NOT FOR US TO SAY, “THANK YOU” WHEN TEMPTATION COMES CALLING; HOWEVER, THE STORY IS ONLY PARTLY ABOUT TEMPTATION. TODAY’S TEXT IS ALSO ABOUT JESUS’ CHOICE, AND OURS TO BE OBEDIENT TO GOD. CERTAINLY, IT IS THE MORE DIFFICULT CHOICE FOR HIM TO MAKE, BUT IT MARKS THE BEGINNING AND FRAMES THE WHOLE OF HIS PUBLIC MINISTRY, FROM HIS INITIAL REJECTION AT NAZARETH, TO HIS ARREST AND CRUCIFIXION.

WHAT JESUS KNEW, WHAT WE WILL SPEND A LIFETIME LEARNING IS THAT THE WAY OF GOD IS BOTH THE WAY OF OBEDIENCE AND THE WAY OF FREEDOM IN HIM.

OUR TEXT TODAY TAKES US TO THE WILDERNESS. WHEN LUKE MENTIONS JESUS’ TIME OF FASTING AND TEMPTATION AS LASTING 40 DAYS, HE’S REMINDING US OF THE 40 YEARS OF ISRAEL’S OWN WANDERING IN THE WILDERNESS.

WILDERNESS IN THE BIBLE IS OFTEN A PLACE OF TRIAL, OF TESTING, OF TEMPTATION. IT IS **ALWAYS** A STRUGGLE, AND CAN BE PURIFYING.

IT'S THE CHARACTER OF THE TEMPTATIONS THAT GRABS MY ATTENTION. EACH ONE, IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER NAMES THE TEMPTATION TO GIVE UP ON GOD, TO COME TO BELIEVE THAT GOD IS NOT SUFFICIENT TO MEET OUR NEEDS.

HONESTLY, IT'S NOT THAT THIS ISN'T A REASONABLE TEMPTATION, BECAUSE QUITE FRANKLY, THERE ARE TIMES WHEN IN FACT, OUR NEEDS, EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL, AND MORE, ARE NOT MET. DOES THAT MEAN WE SHIFT OUR ALLEGIANCE OR CONCLUDE THAT GOD SIMPLY DOESN'T CARE?

THIS SHOULD SOUND FAMILIAR, BECAUSE IT WAS THE CONSTANT THEME OF THE ISRAELITES AS THEY WANDERED THE WILDERNESS – DEPRIVATION, HARDSHIP, ISOLATION – AGAIN AND AGAIN, THESE LEAD ISRAEL TO QUESTION THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF GOD.

IF YOU LOOK AT THE TEXT RIGHT BEFORE THIS ONE, IN CHAPTER 3, LUKE TRACES THE LINEAGE OF JESUS ALL THE WAY BACK TO ADAM. SEE, HE WANTS US TO MAKE THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE “ORIGINAL TEMPTATION IN THE GARDEN, AND NOW JESUS’ TEMPTATION, BECAUSE THEY ARE INDEED RELATED.

WE ARE LED TO BELIEVE THAT TEMPTATION IS A CHOICE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL, BUT THE THING ABOUT THE TEMPTATION OF CHRIST IS THAT THE DEVIL DIDN'T SAY *IF YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD THEN SLAUGHTER ALL YOUR ENEMIES IN CONCENTRATION CAMPS*. THE DEVIL DIDN'T SAY *IF YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD THEN TORTURE PEOPLE AT WILL*. MOST OF US WOULDN'T HAVE MUCH TROUBLE TURNING DOWN SUCH OBVIOUS EVIL....BUT THE DEVIL SAID *IF YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD THEN USE YOUR PRIVILEGE TO INDULGE YOURSELF*. AND

WHEN IT'S PUT THAT WAY I THINK MAYBE I'M UNCOMFORTABLY FAMILIAR WITH THIS, THAT IS...IF I'M WILLING TO BE HONEST.

MAYBE THE CENTRAL TEST HERE IS NOT IF WE CAN AVOID TEMPTATIONS, BUT IT'S SEEING HOW WE'VE ALREADY SUCCUMBED TO THEM TO THE EXTENT THAT WE DON'T EVEN SEE WHAT THEY ARE ANY MORE. IF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE WERE BUT AVOIDING REALLY BIG SIN THEN MOST OF US WOULD HAVE ARRIVED ALREADY. MOST OF US CAN MANAGE WITHOUT TOO MUCH DIFFICULTY TO AVOID MURDER, THEFT AND THE LIKE. AND HONESTLY, WE COULD PROBABLY PULL THAT OFF WITHOUT TOO MUCH HELP FROM GOD. MAYBE THE TEST FOR US IS NOT IN RESISTING THE TEMPTATION TO DO SOME BIG UGLY EVIL BUT MAYBE THE TEST IS IN SEEING WHERE EVEN THE SEEMINGLY GOOD HAS A DARK SIDE. AND A GOOD WAY TO FIND WHERE THIS MIGHT BE HAPPENING IS TO SEE WHERE ARE WE JUSTIFYING AND DEFENDING THAT WHICH WE DESPERATELY WANT TO HOLD ON TO. IN OTHER WORDS, AT WHAT POINT DO OUR INDULGENCES BECOME ENTITLEMENTS? AND AT WHAT POINT DO ENTITLEMENTS BECOME NEEDS. AND THEN HOW DO THESE FALSE NEEDS BECOME WAYS TO PROTECT OURSELVES FROM THE PAIN OF BEING HUMAN? AND THEN HOW DO THESE PROTECTIONS BECOME SUCH AN INTEGRAL PART OF US THAT WE NO LONGER SEE THEM FOR WHAT THEY ARE? THESE ARE DECIDEDLY WILDERNESS QUESTIONS.

IN EACH OF THE THREE TEMPTATIONS JESUS ENDURES, THE SEED OF MISTRUST IS PRESENT. YOU MAY GO HUNGRY – YOU NEED A BETTER PROTECTOR, PROVE FOR YOURSELF ONCE AND FOR ALL THAT GOD IS TRUSTWORTHY.

IN EACH CASE, JESUS ASSERTS CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S PRESENCE AND PROMISES BY TURNING TO THE SCRIPTURES – THE VERY THING SATAN TRIES TO USE AGAINST HIM.

JESUS FINDS IN THE SCRIPTURES THE WORDS TO GIVE VOICE TO HIS TRUST.

IT'S THE SAME REASON WHY, WHEN I VISIT THE SICK IN THE HOSPITAL, OR THE SHUT INS, I LIKE TO READ SCRIPTURES WITH THEM. IT'S THE STORY OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD THAT STILL

HAS THE CAPACITY TO ALLOW US TO NAME OUR DESPAIR, OUR FEAR AND OUR DOUBT. IT
STILL HAS THE CAPACITY TO GIVE VOICE TO OUR HOPE, OUR FAITH, AND OUR TRUST.

IT'S HIS WORD THAT LEADS US TO THE WORDS TO BARE OUR OWN HEARTS TO ONE ANOTHER
THROUGH HIM. IN THE NAME OF JESUS. AMEN.