

First Sunday in Lent
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
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Every year on the first Sunday in Lent, we read a story about Jesus's temptation. This year, we get it from Luke's perspective which is a bit different than Matthew and Mark. In today's reading, like in Matthew, we witnessed a conversation of sorts between the devil and Jesus. Now to be clear, the devil is a personified version of all that draws us from the ideals of God. We're not talking about a physical being with a pitchfork and horns, right?

Anyway, the devil and Jesus engage around three "temptations" that tried to draw Jesus away from realizing his divine identity. That is important for understanding these three temptations. For, they are not garden-variety temptations. This is more than being tempted to sneak some chocolate after giving it up for Lent. Instead, Jesus's vocation, his calling, or his full identity is being challenged. And, each of these temptations are going to reveal a bit more about Jesus's identity.

First, in verse three we heard it read, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Now, the English translation here is a little wonky. The essence of this in Greek goes, "Since you are the Son of God... do this." Now, Jesus *could* do this, right? And, if I was as hungry as he was after being without food for 40 days, I would've made that stone into some bread... maybe with a side of maple butter too. Lucky for the world, I'm not Jesus; but Jesus knew he was Jesus with the whole booming voice after his baptism (Luke 3:21-22), so Jesus stuck with the program. You see, this temptation was about how Jesus is human but, also, how Jesus is more than a human.

Okay, now the second temptation. If you think the Bible, or at least my preaching, is too political then buckle in. Because we heard that the embodiment of greed (aka the devil) took Jesus to a high place and showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. And, in Greek, the word for kingdom can also be translated as “empire.” You know, like the United States, or Russia, or, in that time, Rome. The devil reminded Jesus that (get this) all of the empire’s authority comes from the devil. So, the embodiment of greed, evil, and pride (aka the devil) gives empires their authority, and Jesus doesn’t argue with that point! Gaahhhh, what a political commentary on empires! I mean, I cannot make this up. It’s right there in the Bible. My role is to point this out to you. Your job is to wrestle with what that means and how it shapes your engagement with the empire who creates policies, laws, and make military interventions on our behalf. Because Luke’s Jesus was not a fan of the empire, Jesus was crucified by the empire, and Jesus didn’t think that status quo built on fear, war, and dehumanization of others was aligned with God’s purposes. So, when you send a nasty email about my political preaching, how about we agree that I’ll simply send you a link to the Gospel of Luke - – deal?

Now, Jesus responded to this second temptation by focusing on worshipping God alone (also known as the Shema in Judaism). Which, frankly, is a good reminder for all of us. We’re quick to worship political leaders of our partisan persuasion thinking they will bring long-lost freedom, clarity, and joy. We worship the Gods of social media and youth. We idolize marriage, sex, travel, and money. We confuse confidence with ego, and we believe the ends justify the means. We take the route of worshipping the things that are of, well, the empire. But, Jesus reminds us that we are called to worship God, and God’s vision for the world alone. A world where the poor are valued, where we are willing to discover our own blindness with grace, where the oppressed are free, where peacemaking is exalted, where radical generosity reigns and hypocrisy is rejected. That’s God’s vision for the world.

But, on to scene three. Now we went to the top of the temple, and the devil got crafty. The accuser was onto Jesus and took a page from his book. So, the devil

quoted some Scripture. But just because you know the Scriptures, it does not mean you understand the essence of what the Scriptures communicate. Here, the devil cherry picked what will work for the argument and discarded the rest of Psalm 91. But, Jesus was on to this tactic. For Psalm 91 is not a doctrinal statement, instead, it is a profession of faith. Or, put another way, Psalm 91 does not describe how God *always* acts. It does not mean that, if we believe hard enough, that no evil will come our way. It does not mean that, if you have enough faith, that you can charm a venomous snake without getting bit. What Psalm 91 said was that God has shown Godself to be faithful in sustaining God's people in pain, sorrow, and despair because God has done this work in the past. And Jesus knows the truth about Psalm 91 because he knows the full scope of scripture.

You see, in Jesus's temptations we see the identity of our loving God. We have a God who, like you and me, has lived in the wildernesses of life. A God who has been in the muck of the world that weighs us down and drowns our identity, but, unlike our selfish selves, Jesus remained focused on his calling. For, we have a God that is not confused by political parties, kingdoms, empires, and elected officials who operate under a different worldview than God offers. And, God is well aware that there are many a preacher, teacher, and scholar who want to prey on you with theologies and ideologies that are exclusive, hateful, and fearful. But our God is a God that constantly and consistently widens the circle of welcome.

So, it's no wonder that all of Jesus's quotes come from Deuteronomy today. For, in Deuteronomy we see Moses talking to a new generation of Israelites after having wandered in the desert for 40 years. And, these Israelites need some help remembering how God works. So, Moses reminds them that God is one. That worshipping God means caring for the poor and the marginalized. That the essence of our faith is to love God and to love our neighbor because God gave us an identity centered in God's love.

Friends, there it is. Today we are reminded that in the midst of the wilderness moments of life, our God is with us, among us, and faithful to us. For God has given us this community of people to share in a holy meal at this table. God has given us the waters poured out at that font, which bathes us in an identity that works for justice and peace. God has given us the good news that our God does not simply talk the talk, but that our God walks the walk. So, journey with me, friends, on the road ahead as we come to better know our God who has lived it all. Amen.