

6 March 2022 || Lent 1
Thrown Around
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Luke 4:1-15

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, **2** where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished.

3 The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.”

4 Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”

5 Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. **6** And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. **7** If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.”

8 Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”

9 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, **10** for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’

11 and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”

12 Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

13 When the devil had finished every test, he departed from [Jesus] until an opportune time.

14 Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. **15** He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

Ted Wardlaw, the president of Austin Presbyterian Seminary, told me about the night his daughter went to high school prom. They had talked about curfew, expectations for her behavior that night, Ted knew and liked his daughter's date, but also knew he was sending his daughter out into the world and could no longer protect her, or make decisions for her. He had to trust her. As his daughter left the house, Ted says, he felt parental panic rising in his chest and called after her, "remember your baptism!"

Oh, pity the pastor's children.

What I suspect he *meant* was:

remember who you are.

Remember you are God's beloved child.

Remember who you are called to be.

Because, goodness, if there aren't all kinds of voices and messages and images trying to lure us and shape us in one way or another, often away from who God created us to be.

In today's gospel lesson — the one that marks this first Sunday of Lent — we have a story about Jesus contending with voices and messages and images that try to lure him away from who he is called to be.

The devil — the architect of these temptations — he tries three times to lure Jesus away from who he is called to be. And it seems like it should be pretty clear cut. I mean, if the devil asks you to do something, you should say, "no." Right? But the devil is a pretty crafty guy. He tempts Jesus not with *bad* things, but with *good* things!¹

- The first test: turning a stone into bread, to feed Jesus' hunger.

¹ This insight is Fred Craddock's, available in multiple places. Ex. The People's New Testament Commentary. p. 189.

- Would a loaf of bread be so bad? After 40 days of fasting? But there's an even larger question at work here, too. Arguably one even more tempting. Will Jesus use miracles to solve social problems ... like hunger?... like the 1 in 5 children in the US who suffer from hunger.² One in five.
- The second test: will Jesus worship the devil so that all the kingdoms are under Jesus's control?
 - Again, it has an upside, doesn't it? Imagine what Jesus could do if he had political control over all the nations of the world and didn't allow us to screw things up. I'd give into that temptation... particularly as we watched the Russians shift to a new strategy of pummeling civilian areas this week.³
- The third test given to Jesus: "throw yourself off of this tip top point of the Temple," the devil says. "Call upon God to protect you."
 - Wouldn't that be grand proof of God's strength and Jesus' power?! And don't we all yearn for God's protection?! Don't we sometimes pray, hoping God will respond with just what we want, and just how we want it?

The Greek word for devil is *diabolos* and it comes from two Greek words. *Dia*, which means around or through. And *ballo*, which means to throw.

Put together, the words literally mean, "one who throws things around, one who stirs things up." *Diabolos*, the devil, then, is the one who throws things around and gets us confused. "The devil comes and takes the pieces of ourselves that we are constantly trying to sort out: our roles, our relationships, our obligations and our callings. [The devil] throws all the

² <https://bread.org/who-experiences-hunger> - 2.6 million children die each year in the US from hunger related causes.

³ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-forces-target-ukrainian-civilian-areas-as-missile-hits-central-kharkiv-11646124675>

pieces up into the air, and we get confused. We can't remember who we are."⁴

We see that in this story. The things the devil tempts Jesus with are things Jesus actually wants and will carry out in his ministry — he will feed the hungry and proclaim the kingdom of God and offer healing. Good things.

And that's exactly what makes them tempting. At the heart of every temptation, there is something that stirs us up and confuses us as to where the good lies. At the heart of every temptation is the tug for us to be who we are not. But it can be hard to figure out which things tempt us away from God and which things help us to follow God.

You know, and I know, there are all kinds of temptations, all kinds of things that stir us up and confuse us in this world, from small to big and everything in between. And often, they are not bad things.

Money, for example. It can enable us to live fully and to be generous toward others. It can solve problems and alleviate suffering. And it can insulate us such that we lose connection to the needs of our neighbors, lose sight of where our true value lies.

A political ideology can tempt us. The ideals and freedoms of this country seek the common good. And yet we have calcified these values into partisanship that idolizes some and cancels others and leaves all of us worse off.

Even the **bible** can tempt us — when we look only to the comfort it offers while skirting around what it demands of us: namely that we follow Jesus, that we turn the other cheek, that we forgive 70 times 7, that we care for the poor, and widows and orphans. That we welcome strangers and eat with outcasts.

⁴ Clarence Jordan. *The Substance of Faith*, as quoted by Meg Peery McLaughlin in a sermon *Jesus 101: Jesus is Tempted*, preached at Village Presbyterian Church on Jan. 13, 2008.

Out in the wilderness, what saves Jesus is not super-human strength or a divine forcefield. What saves him from confusion is what his faith has taught him. He responds to the devil with scripture. Through the scriptures, he remembers who he is and who he is called to be.

Friends, this is why we come to church. To be reminded of who we are, who we are called to be. So that we don't get stirred up and confused, but can channel the pieces of our lives toward God in Christ. The rhythms and rituals of church life help us do this very thing. But we can forget that sometimes...because the rhythms of church can become routine, the rituals can become rote.

So I want to spend just a few minutes today reminding us why we do the things we do as a community of faith.

We have church seasons to help orient us toward God in Christ. This season, the season of Lent, focuses our attention on growth in faith. Historically, Lent was used as a season to prepare believers for baptism. These 40 days we are invited to focus on our baptismal identity. That we are beloved children of God. And so is everyone else. We should treat one another accordingly.

We have the scriptures. The stories of our faith help us — like they helped Jesus — to remember our identities as people of God.

When I am brought up short by the pain and suffering in the world I remember:

The waters will roar and foam but they will not overwhelm.

When I am ready to give up on humanity, Paul's words call to me:
outdo one another in honoring one another.

When I need to be challenged to act, Jesus says: *As you have done it to one of the least of these, you have done it to me.*

When I need a swift kick in the rear, I think of the Almighty saying to Job: *Gird up your loins!*

The scriptures are the stories of God for the people of God. When they become part of us, they remind us of who God is, and who we are as God's own.

We have worship. Worship gives us a chance to practice here, in this place, the kind of living God calls us to.

We greet one another without agenda or motive, but with mutuality and blessing - "The Lord be with you."

We come honestly before God to confess our faults and receive the blessing of forgiveness so that we might forgive others.

We are shaped by the words of scripture.

We offer ourselves through our presence and our tithes.

And we publicly declare our allegiance to God as we say together the words of the apostles' creed.

We will share in communion today, the retelling of the story of the last supper and Jesus' instruction to share in this bread and cup in remembrance of him. To partake of the body of Christ, and so become part of it.

We got to share in the baptism of a precious child today. As that water trickles down a forehead, we are reminded that we have been marked as God's own.

We are given community, so that we are not alone, so that we can provide care and comfort, and so that we might call after one another, "remember your baptism!"

These practices are not flashy. Nor are they just quaint little traditions of an outdated religion. These practices help us to remember who we are as the beloved children of a living God.

On weeks like this one — when the brokenness of humanity is writ large and things seem far beyond my reach — I often wish for something flashy

and grand to sweep away the problems. I might wish that Jesus had turned a stone to bread or taken political control. But what I need is to be molded yet again by these everyday practices that point me back to God. I need these practices that help me remember who I am. Remember who we are.

When we remember, we won't get all stirred up. We won't be thrown about by all that vies for our allegiance. We won't be frozen nor frenzied by competing voices.

When we remember, we trust we are God's people, known and claimed and sent into the world to spread love,

when we remember this, we have all the strength we need to contend against all evil.

So remember, friends, remember.