

“He Deliberated - For Us.”

Luke 4:1-13

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Shall we pray?

Faithful God, when we are famished and vulnerable may your Spirit lead us to be the beautiful people you have created us to be. May the words of my mouth and the mediations of our hearts be acceptable to you, Oh our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Today’s Gospel text from commences our Lenten season. It is the culmination of Jesus final preparations for his public ministry. Jesus has been baptized by John in the River Jordan where he heard “You are my son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased”. He is now beginning to live those words in human flesh, he is becoming the “witness” that God birthed, with sinew and marrow, hair and bone. The Spirit intentionally led him into the wilderness to meet the devil. Thus, his first “witness” takes place privately in relative secrecy.

Jesus was deeply exhausted and famished. The devil came to him in three powerful temptations, twisted forms of true discipleship, designed to lure Jesus from away from a righteous devotion to God.

First was the temptation to satisfy his own hunger through selfish miracles: instead of focusing on the goodness of *feeding the hungry*.

Second was the temptation to be given authority over all the kingdoms and powers of the world in exchange for Jesus’ worship of the devils corruption and lies; instead of *worshipping God who rules with divine justice*.

Then Jesus was placed high on the pinnacle of the temple and tempted to throw himself to his own death to test the Lord God: instead of *trusting in God and serving God faithfully*. Each time, Jesus deliberated and quoted holy scripture. Each time Jesus resisted.

Each time Christ found a way to honor God and God within himself. Each time he preserved the line between divine devotion and that which is twisted by placing self or something else before God.

Who thought that *feeding the hungry, worshiping God who rules with divine justice, or trusting in God and serving God faithfully* could be such sources of great temptation?

You know these temptations are not particularly seductive. There were no whispers of insatiable wealth or carnal pleasures. No, these temptations were far more subtle and conniving. The temptations presented Jesus were framed within well-attested scriptural expectations. Everyone assumed that these three methods would be the methods that God's would use to redeem Israel. The tempter attempts to harness the collective Messianic hopes of God's people- to turn Jesus away from God. In the words of one theologian:

Many followers of Jesus wanted him to free Israel, to restore an earthly kingdom marked by honor and glory. To say yes to the world would have required Jesus to say no to God, to the way of God, and an idea of God's kingdom that those followers simply did not understand. It would have required him to say no to the freedom and love for humanity that are the marks of his death and resurrection. – Lori Brandy Hale

Jesus devotes needed him to interpret God's presence within their world, and his choices then shaped the identity of the early church in relationship to their persecution and survival. So, after deliberation, and when tested against his personal calling, Jesus determined these collective messianic temptations to be "yesterday's will of God". Then the juxtaposition of Jesus "yes" to God meant a clear and profound "no" to the world around him.

More often than not, Isn't the value and method of our "yes" to God almost completely unrecognizable given the context which surrounds us?

I invite you to open up your bulletin to the first page. There you will see a beautiful paper lace print entitled Temptations, by Hannah Garrity. Take a moment to deliberate on this delicate and frail depiction of our scripture. See it swords and crowns, its steeples and nails, circles radiating out organically depicting the wilderness. Now in silence, wonder about the questions printed beneath. Know that the Spirit which lead you here today is with you now, calling you to faithfulness deliberation and divine devotion.

How will you say no to this world so that you can say "yes" to your loving God?

Jesus was deeply obedient to God. His responses came full of knowledge. He quoted scripture, Deuteronomy saying "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him. Do not put the lord your God to the test." Prepared with God's good Word, Jesus' knowledge underscores his faithfulness, setting the whole stage for his ministry and ultimately his sacrifice.

In the season of Lent, we are invited to embrace a certain way of life: to be disciplined and intentional. For forty days we follow Jesus who was “led by the Spirit in the wilderness.” The Spirit though, did not just drop him off like an uber or morning shuttle ride, the Spirit stayed with him. The Spirit abided with him. The Spirit though was unencumbered. The Spirit was beyond the reach of temptations seeking to harass and create hostile circumstances designed to pressure Jesus to become something, someone, he was never intended to be.

Just as the Spirit stayed alongside God’s chosen Son, The Spirit stays alongside God’s chosen people- alongside us, here, in this room, if even in delicate lace print. God does not need to be clothed in our power or permanency. Only God is omnipotent and everlasting. It is the promise of God that by the Grace of Jesus Christ that we can become something, or someone new, the person God has always intended us to be.

Theologians have endlessly debated the existence, origin, and ultimate power of evil. Many harmful sermons have been preached, laying the blame of the entirety of creations brokenness upon a single person’s head amidst their struggle while wandering the wilderness. The word “sin” has been used to control and castigate many members of many. Truly many modern faith communities continue to have a controlling pre-occupation with sin. Divine freedom and hope are sidelined and replaced with a transactional approach, like “works righteousness”. The fundamental goodness of humanity is devalued through some metastatic Calvinism proclaiming our “utterly depraved” over and above the Good News. Over and above the handiwork of our father in heaven.

Failing to acknowledge our sinfulness is just as corrosive to our relationship with our Lord God, as it is to overlook our inherent goodness and the goodness of The One who embrace us as his own.

We are beloved, loved, valued and called to individual and corporate expressions of discipleship. Thus, our choosiness, our priestly anointment, must be complemented by preparation and deliberation. Just like Christ, for us to claim our roles as his disciples, we must be practiced, tested, wise to our deliberate the weighty choices which can feel like a burden, but are often as sign of Gods faithfulness who entrusts us with weighty and divine work. These deliberations often happen in places of hunger and despair. In these experiences we learn fidelity to God and dependance upon the Spirit, who systemically provides for all our needs. The Spirit is always present to enrich our deliberation & refine our discernment.

And so, the question really is: are we ready? Have we prepared ourselves through practice and education? Have we sat in the wilderness and truly deliberated upon what is the will of God not yesterday, but today?

In scripture Jesus intentionally “takes on” the rude, embarrassing, and fearful works of modeling the importance of a living faith on his journey to the Cross. Lent is about being intentional:

Intentional in repentance. Intentional in fellowship. Intentional in prayer. Intentional in fasting. Intentional in scriptural education. Intentional in acts of piety, in acts of justice, in acts of evangelism, in acts that re-affirm our basic baptismal covenants to one another which call us into close, mutual, interdependent- community.

And if we choose the Lenten struggle of “Taking upon ourselves” and are receptive to God’s grace, we will find our faithful God in the form of the Spirit. The Spirit will not only lead us into the wilderness but will stay with us and lead us to find ourselves anew and live into the unique person God made us to be.

Jesus sought to feed the hungry and refused to exploit his power and status- will we?

Jesus sought to worship God who rules with divine justice and refused to reject God’s sovereignty- will we?

Jesus sought trust in God and serving God faithfully and refused to put God to the test- will we?

This Lent there is much to deliberate and many joyful ways to say “yes” to God. Will you close with me, pray with me?

Servant Christ,

Help us to follow you into the desert,

With you to fast, denying false luxury.

Refusing the tempting ways of self-indulgence,

The way of success at all costs,

The way of coercive persuasion.

Servant Christ, help us to follow you.

Amen.