



Temptations

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Deut. 26:1-11; Luke 4:1-13

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Today is the first Sunday in Lent. This year we journey with wisdom from the gospel of Luke. Luke according to some strands of tradition is said to have been a physician, the word from Greek names one who heals.

As we look around our world, perhaps especially now with all that's happening in and across and it, we're in desperate need of healing. The theme of healing will thread through our reflections each Sunday.

In today's reading from Deuteronomy we hear intoned Israel's story, , "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor..." It's a story of redemption, a narrative of salvation. It's a story of identity. The story is recited, we hear, as part of the ritual of first fruits brought in thanksgiving. Through ritual action the story becomes embodied, as it's recited it's brought to life. The narrative declares God has fulfilled the promises made to God's faithful, chosen people: the promises of land, prosperity and continuity of future generations. It's a narrative to live by, to inhabit, of promise and reassurance.

Narratives, we each have narratives we live by. We story tell our lives. I wonder what stories you tell that remind you of who you are, sustain and restore you. Maybe we've stories to keep us as we are. Some may be religious, others from family, perhaps we've cultural narratives, or ones of social convention as well as the traveller's tales of life experience. Such story lines lead us to think or act in certain ways in response to our daily encounter with the world

around us. We each have our own collection of stories, there isn't an **only** story.

Today I want to look at the religious story we tell in this place, our Christian religious story. Also a redemption narrative, this one gathers around the person of Jesus. Of course the narrative has well exceeded the life and times of Jesus. It's acquired its own interpretations, rituals and dramas of storytelling. As we engage through ritual, we come to embody, to experience the story as part of us and so live it in our daily lives.

Last Wednesday we marked ourselves with ashes, outward sign of inner intention, the beginning of the Lenten period. Forty days and forty nights of focused attention, a hymn to always be included this Sunday. We enter with Jesus' into that forty day wilderness experience Luke's gospel tells of today.

Who is the Jesus you enter with on your journey? We'll each have a version. It's likely made up of a whole mix of things, ideas, experiences, habits and learning. A dash of Jesus as Messiah, a bit of as Son of God, a sprinkle of Jesus as redeemer, along with a smidgen of Jesus the beloved, brother or friend. Jesus who is God, kind of or is that Christ? Jesus who is fully human ... kind of. Whatever our particular Jesus' combination (or confusion) this is the Jesus we bring with us as we listen to today's story. With this Jesus tangle in our head, do we, subconsciously, think Jesus could resist the temptations because he was special. He had insider knowledge so could see through them and see them for what they were. Even though we tell ourselves we know better than this, we know in his time on earth Jesus was fully human, I can't help but wonder if there's leakage. By comparison to Jesus how likely do you think it is that you'd respond with such clear headed resistance?

Of course we don't think this story **literally** happened, devils and temptations and so forth are all metaphors. Which doesn't mean the story isn't true.

Let's take a step back. There are three temptations: stone to bread, power over all the world, catch me if you care. Could we understand them this way?

The first's about the relief of hunger - an invitation to not suffer

The second's about power and control - the invitation to have power to control

The third activates doubt of being beloved - the invitation to need to prove you're loved and matter.

Would you prefer there was no suffering?

Would you prefer to be in control of life, to make the world as you think it should be?

Would you prefer concrete proof you are loved by a God out there?

I mean, who'd say "No" to that?

Could this be a cold shower gospel?

This isn't the way the world is.

The temptation is to want to live in a world that is not like it is.

We devote a lot of time to wishing and wanting and maybe even working to make the world other than it is.

To make the world the ideal we imagine it could be.

It distracts and diverts us, it saps our energy and drives us away from living in the world as it is now, right in front us, a part of us.

A world of suffering,

A world we cannot control (last week's gospel),

A world sustained by a not able to be proven not being.

Nice that makes things easier!!

It is what it is, despite our temptation to think otherwise.

Funny thing, nothing's changed in the world as it is by reorienting our thinking - except maybe we're more present to it - as it is.

Ukraine, Covid, Climate crisis, waves of protesting - chaos, war, brokenness, insecurity. Frightening, life threatening - they each express the way things are.

All terribly overwhelming, if we expect things to be otherwise, and live as if they were, all the while paying no mind to the cracks and fissures before us so unintentionally exacerbate their rupture.

Where's the healing? Good question.

Where isn't it? Or rather where does the potential for healing reside?

We know what healing is, else we wouldn't talk about it, we know how to heal, because it's our real, we've experienced it.

Are we willing to embody our religion's narrative: resist the temptations to live life **not** as it is, because we'd prefer it to be otherwise? Are we grounded enough in our story to accept life **as it is** and learn from it as we face into it's familiar discomfort?

By bringing our scattered attention to the here and now, to uncover our remarkable resourcefulness to participate and contribute to the healing of the hurting.

Where, might you ask, is God in all this? Where is God not? What causes you to lift your eyes beyond yourself, to hear and heed the cries of our world? Despite all that would quench it, does a light still burn within you? Brought close to despair that can overwhelm, within or other side of this darkness, that light still glows. And you're not alone, there are others who know this too, who with you glimmer and glisten this light into being. Call it hope, call it healing, this light is within the world **as it is**. Its here it's made real.