

Year C, Lent 1

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Luke 4:1-13 and Romans 10:8b-13

### **Entertaining a New Story**

We have been studying stories we humans construct on how to live happily ever after. So far, we have reviewed six of these stories and have come to the conclusion that none of them work. All six turn us on each other or on the environment that nurtures us. In the end, each of the six stories destroys relationships making most people very sad and unhappy.

Today, being Lent One, we enter a new story that leads to the cross and a revelation about we humans as story-tellers. In the seventh story we discover that God has been working a story for us all along. This is the story that gets it right and does lead to a life lived happily ever after.

Our new story begins, “Jesus returned from the Jordan River full of the Holy Spirit.” Being full of the Holy Spirit means being completely under the influence of God’s love, feeling that warmth and benevolence that comes from the inside like when taking communion with the gathered community. But Jesus, so full of God’s generous and unambiguous love, must reenter our world governed by the spirit of rivalry, acquiring for ourselves while often ignoring the other, and seeking power where might makes right. Does he have what it takes to survive and triumph in our fallen world?

The Spirit leads Jesus into a place of isolation. In the wilderness he is harassed by old voices who call him to abandon his quest to reveal the falseness of the human story based, as it is on exclusion, and the new story based on love, forgiveness and inclusion of all God’s creation.

The Spirit sends Jesus to a barren place away from John the Baptist and all other human influences for his testing. The sense of God’s presence within must be grounded in God and God alone and not built on being popular, liked or approved by the significant humans who co-inhabit his life.

In the wilderness “he was tempted for forty days by the devil.” The devil is Luke’s way of talking about the demons in our heads. They can get pretty wild when we are left alone with them. Being deeply interested in what it means to be human and believing the New Testament, in its pre-scientific way, gives us an understanding of humanness that modern science is only beginning to discover, I see Jesus’ conversation with the devil as a way to talk about the battle going on within Jesus and in us all.

Like all of us, Jesus has many contending voices including the Spirit of his father. Will he listen to his father or give in to the voices that have come from other places? If we could remember where these voices came from it would be much easier to challenge them. But often we can't. The owners of the voices have usually disappeared like dreams we forget upon waking.

Picture the first battle: Jesus had eaten nothing for forty days and afterward he was starving. "The devil said to him, 'Since you are God's Son, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.'" Since you are special, you can take shortcuts to character development. You don't need to work at it; pray, fast, do spiritual disciplines, exercise, take risks to grow as a person. You can ignore those hard slow processes and get gratification immediately.

Don't we struggle with the idea that we are so special we don't have to say "no" to ourselves sometimes? I struggle with this. I got into the salty tortilla chips while writing this. Jesus answered the devil with, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" Maybe we need powerful and deep relationships instead. Johann Hari, in his book, Chasing the Scream, thinks relationships are the missing substance we seek when we have difficulty saying "no" to lesser substances.

"Next the devil led him to a high place and showed him in a single instant all the kingdoms of the world. 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. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.'" Worship me, the devil says, by pointing the finger that excludes the weak and vulnerable and you shall have my power and glory. Yes, this is the power Satan does have and it is his to give to whomever he chooses. Right now he wants to give his finger-pointing power to Jesus.

"Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "Worship the Lord, and serve only him."'" We too are tempted to worship that which is lesser than God. Sometimes it is in the form of another person in our life, maybe it is a system of beliefs we have made higher than God or even the country we live in, be it Nigeria or the United States. Two thousand years ago Paul said "if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

How does confessing with our lips save us? When we claim Jesus as our Lord it organizes the voices within us; it is an act of clarity for it reveals who has first place. When others see us take a clear position, it changes their view of us thus reinforcing the declaration we have made. Now, not only do I believe in my heart that I am in relation to our Lord, but others now see me that way as well, adding to the depth of my commitment. It's like getting married publically—you can get married secretly—but you won't have the social network to support you then. The sense of being inside of God's redemption needs social confirmation to be felt. Jesus is the

center of our constellation of relationships—Jesus is Lord. He will continue to be the orienting center—therefore our future is assured—everything is covered.

This salvation won't be our doing; as though our confession and profession made it happen, rather in our confession and profession we allow ourselves to be put under Jesus' umbrella where we know all is well because of Jesus, our Lord.

“The devil brought him into Jerusalem and stood him at the highest point of the temple. He said to him, “Since you are God’s Son, throw yourself down from here; for it’s written: He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you and they will take you up in their hands so that you won’t hit your foot on a stone.” The devil is inviting Jesus to be spectacular, to draw attention to yourself, to break the rules of gravity and good sense, trusting that God will intervene and rescue him. This will show the people that God is all powerful so that they will turn and believe in Jesus. And the people will also see that you, Jesus, are God’s son since God promises he will rescue you. You don’t doubt that do you, Jesus? And think of the publicity that would get you. Headline: “God’s Son falls from top of the pinnacle of the Temple and is completely uninjured.” You wouldn’t have to go to the cross, suffer, die and be raised on the third day if you will just jump without a bungee cord; trusting God instead. Choose power rather than vulnerability, the spectacular rather than the common, the loud and raucous rather than the still small voice.

“Jesus answered him, ‘It is said, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”’ Don’t ask God to do the spectacular just to see if you have power over God. You don’t. God is God. Instead trust him. It is in trusting him that we live happily ever after.

After finishing every temptation, the devil departed from him until the next opportunity. The testing for Jesus was over for now but there were more to come. Even the Garden of Gethsemane was a test. Amen.