SERMON NOTES — March 9, 2025

God sent an indigenous man to save humankind from the evils of human empire — or what today we are calling "nationalism." Could the Good News Jesus the indigenous Messiah be any more timely at this moment?

Here's the bad news: we've been taught to understand the message of the indigenous Messiah Jesus in the context of being empire, of being the people in charge who rule over all other peoples, including any indigenous peoples who already live in the lands we come to occupy. We've been taught that it's part of our mission to save them from their pagan ways. We have Jesus, the only one who can get us to heavenly afterlife. So we've done things in our history like kidnaping indigenous children, taking them from their parents and tribal community, in order to place them in schools which seek to force them to believe what we believe and to do things like we do them. Example: one of the main supbplots in the current TV series 1923 (the young Crow woman, Teonna Rainwater, in the middle of the picture).

If this is what being 'Woke' is about, then I'm all in. I've come to read the story of Jesus as his saving us from our nationalistic empires. The first step is repentance, which we might name today as being Woke. We need to understand the evils of empire in order to resist the temptations to continue in their ways.

I believe that that's how we can read today's Gospel Reading: Jesus showing us how to resist the temptations of empire.

- First Temptation: turn stones into bread. Jesus' response: "one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD" (Deut 8:3). Empire often tries to control us by keeping our eyes over-focused on "kitchen table" issues of surviving day-to-day. Jesus reminds us that there's more to life behind the sabbath economics of God providing for us when we live justly with one another.
- Second Temptation: the one which clearly centers this passage on the empires of human history. Satan shows them to Jesus "in an instant" — if you've seen one, you've seen them all. Jesus' response: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him" (Deut 6:13). There should be no human authoritarian leaders to which we pledge our allegiance, or to whom we allow to rule over us. That's God's place. Democracy is the amazing new thing in which we rule together; no one person should rule over us all. If we seek to live more deeply and justly into democracy, we can learn to resist this second temptation of empires.
- Third temptation: Satan does quoting of the Bible himself, citing Psa 91:11 to get Jesus to throw himself off the temple tower. Jesus' response: "Do not put the LORD your God to the test" (Deut 6:16). It is the temptation of imperial leaders to see themselves as so close to God that they can do anything with impunity, that they are somehow exempt from any consequences for the actions they take. In effect, it is the temptation of nationalistic leadership to become gods unto themselves. Does it sound familiar to any billionaires we know?

One final question: who is the tempter in this vision quest? "Satan," the great Accuser who keeps us enslaved to Us-vs-Them thinking. (See, for example, Luke 11:17-18 — **"**If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?") Divide and conquer is the Way of Empire — quite opposite of Jesus' Way of being human, centered on thing like healing love and forgiveness, and on true justice in the form of equity for all God's children.

Siblings in Christ, you and I are called to follow in the way of Jesus the Indigenous Man, who came to save us from the human kingdoms forever divided from themselves. We are called to live by forgiveness rather than retribution. Let us take up the call of this season to repent of our having giving into the temptations of empire, in order to instead follow the One executed by empire on the Cross — the one who can help us to say "No" to these temptations and begin to enter into God's reign, *especially* at this time of living under the shadow of a rising Christian nationalism. Amen.