

## **Lent 1 Year A,**

Sermon by Glenn A. Brumbaugh

1<sup>st</sup> March, 2020

**Romans 5:12-19 NRSV / Matthew 4:1-11 NRSV**

We all face choices in life, don't we. Our daily lives are full of choices.

Some are the mundane routine decisions like what to wear and what to eat.

Other choices have more consequences

like going to work or school, what car or dwelling we choose to acquire.

Often with those more impactful decisions,

we take time to reflect and think things through.

Many of us may make a list of pros and cons,

and try to choose what will result in the most beneficial outcome for us.

Sometimes it can be helpful to step back from the busyness of our daily lives

to give ourselves some space to think things through.

Personally, I do my best thinking on the road.

Nothing is better for me like a long road trip

to work out those tough decisions.

My trips to Olympia aren't only for worship purposes.

Others seek that time away through meditative practices,

or taking some time in nature, hiking and camping.

Along those lines, many of the prophets in the Bible

often sojourned into the wilderness to find peace and solitude

when they were faced with major challenges and decisions.

In our Gospel story today, Jesus found himself at a turning point.

Having been baptized and recognized as God's beloved,

he was beginning his ministry as a rabbi.

For the human man Jesus was, that's a lot to take in,

and more was to come that he needed to think about, to meditate on.

So, like the prophets before him, we're told Jesus was led away by the Spirit:

Away from the cities where he was preaching;

away from the shadow of John the Baptist.

He stepped aside for forty days and nights to meditate and sharpen his focus.

And being familiar with Matthew's perspective,

that length of time is not a coincidence.

Moses, when he went up the mountain in the Sinai to receive the law,

fasted for forty days and nights.

Matthew never misses the chance

to create a comparison between Jesus and Moses,

and his audience would have not missed that either.

Yet he wasn't led into the wilderness just to fast and meditate.

He had more choices than he planned to consider; he had temptation to face.

He was famished, hungry, ready to indulge.

"If you are the Son of God,

command these stones to become loaves of bread."

It's not only the temptation to satisfy one's longing,

one's desire, but the self-doubt that has crept in.

When we think of Jesus, we tend to focus on the Incarnation,  
the divine aspect of his character, and often forget his humanity,  
that part of him susceptible  
to the same doubts and insecurities we all struggle with.

The struggles with questions like, is he really the Son of God?

The Deceiver plays on this and tells him, to prove yourself, show yourself.

Show off to others.

Satisfy your own needs and desires to prove who you are.

Yet Jesus rejects this option makes a different choice,

he tells him "No," and quotes Moses from Deuteronomy,

"One does not live by bread alone,

but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Like a mother eagle feeding her hatchlings.

That's how God feeds us, how we survive,

how we live, the words we live by.

The Deceiver then took him to the holy city,

and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple.

Jesus looked down, frightened.

"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,

'He will command his angels concerning you,'

and 'On their hands they will bear you up,

so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

Prove it. Prove you are God's Son and fly. Let the angels catch you.

I've got Scripture on my side.

Prove to me you are who you think you are.

Because if you're not, shouldn't you end this charade now?

Yet again Jesus rejects this choice and turns him down.

"Again, it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

He could quote Scripture too.(again Moses from Deuteronomy)

He didn't need to prove himself.

Then the Deceiver took him to a high mountain

and showed him all the kingdoms of the world.

Wouldn't it be great to be king of it all?

To rule the world with an iron fist

and have things go the way you want them to?

Wouldn't it be great to restore order and create peace?

"All of these I will give you, if you fall down and worship me."

Like [this film clip from Star Wars](#),

Jesus was being offered the opportunity for great worldly power,

to order the world the way he wanted,

to bring peace and safety to the ones he loved.

But unlike Anakin, Jesus sees through all that. He knows it wouldn't last.

He knows that empire is NOT the way.

Empire is subjugation, enslavement, abuse, appropriation.

Empire is colonization and domination.

Empire is not freedom.

Who is the Deceiver?

The Deceiver is absolute power and control.

The Deceiver is the one who says that in order to have peace  
we must have domination.

The Deceiver is the one who says we must use violence to stop violence.  
Hate your enemies to stop hate.

The Deceiver is also the one that whispers “you are not good enough.

You are not who you think you are.

You can't make a difference in the world;

you can't even take care of yourself let alone others.

Who do you think you are?”

Jesus then ends the temptation.

“Away with you, Satan!

For it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only God!’”

For if God is our Lord, then the emperor is not.

If Jesus is Lord, then Caesar is not.

If Jesus is our Savior,

then presidents and leaders

and parties and coalitions and governments and countries are not.

Cyrus the Great of Persia allowed the exiled Israelites

to return home and rebuild their temple...

but he was still the king of the Persian Empire.

The Roman Empire allowed the Jewish people  
to worship their God in their temple,  
and at times allowed Christians to worship freely,  
but they were still the Roman Empire.

They still thought of their ways as better than others.

They still controlled and dominated and allowed systems of sin to prevail.

So too, do our contemporary empires allow systemic sin to persist.

The school-to-prison pipelines.

The wealth gap that continues to grow

and the millions living in poverty to increase in numbers

while profits increase in billions for companies and executives.

The lifting up of one language above others,

of one skin color above others.

Empire sows fear because through fear empire can control.

Laws are passed in a hurry, orders given,

under the illusion of safety and security,

when in reality, it increases the Us versus Them rhetoric.

But Jesus chose a different path, an unexpected path

for those who looked on him as the long-promised messiah

that they've been waiting for.

They were looking at him through empire lenses.

They expected a ruler, mighty in the force that the world values,

to ride in and bring peace, prosperity,

and freedom through brutal force and violence.

They looked for another king of the Davidic line, proud and regal,  
with an Israel First outlook.

Yet Matthew presents them with more of a Moses-like ruler.

A man of humility, who does great works, not for himself or his glory,  
but for the individuals he leads.

A reluctant ruler.

Someone those without power and prestige could identify with,  
feel comfortable asking for help, sharing a meal with.

A humble man who shared in the same struggles, the same doubts,  
the same temptations.

Someone like us.

Today's scripture is as much about the temptations and choices we face  
as it is about those faced by Jesus.

After all, he was fully human as well, with the same human temptations.

In this story, evil has a defined persona in the Deceiver, in Satan.

For us, evil and the temptation it offers is rarely so explicitly defined.

Yet temptation exists nonetheless:

Our temptations may look a little different in our time and perspective

but they have the same self-focus as those faced by Jesus.

Temptation comes to us when we look at others

and feel insecure about not having enough.

Temptation comes in judgements we make about strangers, family, or friends

who make choices we don't understand.

Temptation rules us, making us able to look away from those in need,  
and to live our lives unaffected by poverty, hunger, and disease.

Temptation rages in moments when we allow our temper

to define our lives

or when addiction to wealth, power, influence over others,

vanity, or an inordinate need for control defines who we are.

Temptation wins when we engage in the justification of little lies, small sins:

a racist joke, a questionable business practice for the common good,

a criticism of a spouse or partner when he or she is not around.

Temptation wins when we get so caught up in the trappings of life

in the worldly empires in which we live that we lose sight of life itself.

Those are the faceless moments of evil, that while often seem mundane,

lurk in the recesses of our minds and souls.

As we enter the season of Lent this week,

we often fail to see much significance in that season

in our Protestant church of today.

Yet it is those very struggles of temptation,

those choices and guilt that lurk in the recesses of our minds and souls,

that this season is all about.

It's taking time over the next six weeks to engage those dark places in our lives

that we may come face to face with them, name them, understand them,

and seek forgiveness for them.



It's about freedom from the control our fears and insecurities have over us all,  
leading us to resist the temptation they have,  
to finding a new beginning in the promise of Easter morning.

It does all come down to accepting or rejecting the negative choices we are faced with.

Do we choose to confront those dark places in ourselves?

[Do we choose to reject the ways of the worldly empires offered to us?](#)

Ways that do not lead to freedom, but to fear, insecurity, and division?

Lent is your time in the wilderness. What will you choose?