

Worship Service Resources “Resistance”

Lent 1, Year A, 26th February, 2023

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

Prelude

Opening Music [Forgive And Forget](#) - The Mississippi Mass Choir
feat. Carnell Murrell posted to YouTube by malacomg

Welcome Guests / Announcements

Pass the Peace

Opening Hymn *God is Here Among Us - 16*

Call to Worship

One: We are tempted to believe we aren't good enough,

All: But God has called us “Beloved.”

One: We are tempted to believe that we should accept the ways of the world,

All: But Christ has shown us The Way, and the Truth, and the Life.

One: We are tempted to believe that others should conform to our ways,

All: But the Spirit has shown us that God has called all people to be the Beloved Community.

One: We are tempted to fall in line and live according to worldly measures of Success,

All: Come, join the way of God, shown to us by Christ, and follow the movement of the Spirit into new life. Come, worship God, who leads us into life.

Invocation

God, you are our hiding place and our refuge in the time of distress.

We turn to you now, seeking comfort from the wounds of the world and power to face all our afflictions.

Be present in our struggle, and help us to rest in your eternal promises, that we might be fed both with the bread of the world and the nourishment of your word, strong to resist temptation and faithful in our worship of you. Amen.

Epistle Reading

Romans 5:12-19 NRSV

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned—

sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law.

Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many.

And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification.

If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all.

For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

A Time of Prayer

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

Almighty God, Be with us as we contend with our lives and all our challenges. Thank you for listening as we bring before you the troubles that undermine us.

We affirm, it is written, "One does not live by bread alone."

Strengthen and sustain our families and our communities. Nurture the bonds between us and inspire us to live with empathy and forgiveness. Help those struggling with work or facing uncertainty in their futures, that they may find peace in your abundant love.

Jesus, our Redeemer, rescue us when we stumble. We proclaim, it is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."

Enable us to admit the temptations of the world, and support us to resist turning away from your teaching. Awaken us to recognize the gifts you have given each one of us, and to see the role we can play in healing your creation.

Be with our leaders and those around the world, that they may act with compassion and generosity. Guide them to humbly serve their own countries and to foster peace across our borders.

God, our Creator, inspire us with renewed hope. We acknowledge, it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

Deepen our faith to hear your word and follow your way. Encourage us to bring all our hopes and desires to you in prayer, that in lifting up our souls to you, we may be shaped by your love. Help us to hear the dialogue of prayer, and to listen in prayer as much as we speak.

Comfort those battling ill health to bear their pain with patience, strength and courage.

Holy Spirit, our Comforter, sustain us in our times of trial. All this we pray, assured by your eternal love, Amen.

Hymn *Spirit of God! Descend – 502*

Gospel Reading: Matthew 4:1-11 NSRV

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.

The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

But he answered, "It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple,

saying to him, "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.' "

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

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor;

and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.' "

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Message - *Resistance*

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. 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 and 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.”

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. Yet, 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, and the newly recreated Israel was his vassal state.

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, the 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 so 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 find a new beginning in the promise of Easter morning. It does all come down to accepting or resisting and 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 path will you choose?

A Call to Serve

In the story of Adam and Eve, we see creation's splendid possibilities and humanity's tragic limitations. In Christ, we see humanity's strength and God's glory made manifest – the harmony of creation restored.

We offer these gifts and tithes as we seek to restore balance and beauty to a world gone haywire with temptation and deceit.

A Time for Reflection - *Musical Interlude*

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Faithful God, let these commitments and gifts be like food and drink in the wilderness for those who have suffered and longed for your presence. May these offerings strengthen those who are resisting temptation and lead us to attend to all who need your healing touch. This we pray in the name of Jesus, our example and savior. Amen.

Hymn *I Am Weak and I Need Thy Strength* **553**

Benediction

God knows each of us by name. God knows our hearts. God has called each one of us a beloved child.

Embrace this belonging, and extend that same notion to others. See one another as your sibling, as God's child, and see their needs as your own. Go, live into God's ways, seek to reconcile with others, and share the love and forgiveness of God. Amen.

Postlude - *Musical Interlude*