

Matthew 4:1-11

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.

The gospel lesson today tells of the Temptation of Jesus and marks the beginning of Lent. Lent is a forty-day period preparation for Easter.

In the story today Jesus is offered three temptations. First, to end his personal needs—materialism. Second, to prove himself—fame. Third, to control the world—power.

What can we understand at the spiritual level of the story and how does this story relate to us?

At the spiritual level of the story, we are taught about the role of struggle in our lives here on earth.

Very often during our QA period, I’m asked, but did it really exist. Do you think that story took place as it literally is described. Most often I describe stories from the life of Jesus as having happened, but in our tradition, we don’t see this story as a literal encounter.

We see this as a parable that reflects on Jesus entire life. We believe that from a young age Jesus faced temptations and even confusion as he grew into adulthood. It's a pretty fascinating idea and would make a great movie. What was Jesus the teenager like? This parable suggests that throughout his life he faced temptations as all humans do. His were on a great scale, but he had to humble himself to experience our temptations and overcome them.

The temptations represent classic struggles we all go through. What excuses do we make to make a living? I've got to pay the rent. I may not be living the life God would have me live, but I've got bills to pay, mouths to feed.

The next temptation is our desire to be liked or prove ourselves to others. Recent studies have shown that the number one life goal for the rising generation is celebrity. Should we be surprised when we elect a TV celebrity to the highest office in the land?

The third temptation is our craving for power. Nowhere in the world does this temptation live and breath than in Washington DC. Like a magnet this city attracts people who are willing to work long hours and suffer in their paycheck to gain power and the celebrity that entails. And n sadder figure exists than a former Senator. After years of be driven around, sought after for meetings and making decisions that impact millions, they become a shell of their older selves.

The overall teaching of this story is that life on this planet involves struggle. It never stops until we die. The challenges and temptations change over time, but they don't leave us. And the challenges transform as we transform.

Malcolm Mountain Climber

The next hill is waiting.

How does this apply to our lives?

1. Recognize that struggle is normal. We are all struggling with something.

Story of job loss after 2008. Aging?

2. Recognize that we are not alone. We have the power of God and the angels with us always.

At the toughest moment, someone met me.

Can this community be there? Can I as pastor be there?

3. Recognize others are struggling as well.

It's easy to lose patience, but everyone is struggling. Recently wife with husband. Called asked, planned. Took hours of my time. When he returned, she returned and stopped talking to me. I'll need to ask help next time.

Jesus teaches that the temptation of this world hasn't changed that much. He's given us a map and the strength to navigate them if we ask. We are all struggling and must be kinder and gentler to each other.

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