

Lent 1 March 6, 2022 Luke 4.1-13, Psalm 91.1-2,9-16, Deut.26.1-11 Rom.10.8b-13

Luke 4

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” ⁴Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’” ⁵Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And 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. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” ⁸Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” ⁹Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ ¹¹and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” ¹²Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ¹³When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

You might have noticed we’ve back tracked in our reading of Luke’s Gospel. Images of wilderness, struggle and liberation aren’t going anywhere though. Jesus suffers in body soul and spirit in the wilderness—we’re not talking KOA campgrounds with amenities. Jesus has been out there a very long time; he hasn’t eaten. Likely he hasn’t slept well. He’s tired, cold, and alone. Then! The tempter shows up. The diabolical one trots out unoriginal claims meant to goad Jesus into being other than who he is. Remember the temptation in the Garden? The serpent effectively gaslights Adam and Eve, playing on their vulnerability and distorting God’s intentions for them.

This time, the Tempter’s misquotes some scripture hoping to derail Jesus’ identity, and diminish his relationship to God. The aim is to get Jesus to give up his true self in favour of the trappings of power and privilege. The tactic is to goad Jesus into proving something that needs no proof. The incentives are not the tempter’s to give.

Jesus holds fast. he appropriates scripture to lift up God's overarching purposes of life, love and wholeness. Thank God! We can't leave the story there — Words from a preacher's kid come to mind...the Danish Philosopher Soren Kierkegaard notes there is a world of difference between admiring Jesus and following him.

As people of faith called together, we can say following Jesus includes hanging on tight to who and whose we are. We cling to our identity and to what God calls us to do. Remember what we say at baptism....God liberates us? God joins us into Christ's mission for the sake of the world? Let's visit the stories of people of faith; two from history one present day.

When Araminta Ross was a child, she endured beatings from those who enslaved her. Once an irate slave master flung a heavy object at another slave and it hit Araminta instead. Araminta suffered traumatic brain injury marked by chronic pain, dizziness and periods of deep sleep. Araminta started hearing God speak and she saw visions too. Many feared for her sanity.

We know Araminta by the name she chose for herself: Harriet Tubman. Most people called her "Moses". Harriet Tubman led 13 daring rescues of some 70 slaves via the underground railroad. Ms. Tubman served as a nurse, a scout in the Civil war, a spy and a civil rights activist, living long enough to raise her voice in favour of a woman's right to vote.

A Dutch American landholder believed he owned a young girl named Isabella Baumfree. Though enslaved Isabella grew to love another captive named Robert whom she hoped to marry. People who believed they could own them, forbade it and Isabella was married off to Thomas. Isabella, like Harriet, refused to accept living on someone else's terms. As she later wrote to her slave owner, announcing "she walked out by daylight"...Isabella also chose her own name, Sojourner Truth. Sojourner Truth: preacher, civil rights activist, and key player in the liberation of slaves in the American South—a woman refused to let the world define her or deter her from her calling.

Today, a people oceans away hold fast to their rich culture, lengthy history and unique identity refusing to accept a counterfeit version imposed on them by invading tyrants from Moscow. The people of Ukraine are paying dearly by resisting Putin's aggression. Yet... CNN reports that Canada, the US, and European nations have imposed sanctions and intervened more decisively—inspired by people who refuse to turn loose of who they are and where they believe future should lead them.

We might find instruction and wisdom in these stories. We might also ask ourselves core questions like; what does God call us to do and be in our hometown? What does following Jesus in this pandemic life pivoting, anxiety addled, hostility haunted world look like?

Our starting place is that wilderness place—where little is secure yet where God's steadfast, trustworthy love reconnects us to who and whose we are..and then we learn to trust and to hope. Amen.