

Lent 01 C 2019  
March 10, 2019 :: Luke 4:1-13  
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## *“Temptations, and Identity Theft.”*

Temptations. They really don't have to be about food, power, or safety, but in today's gospel reading, that's exactly what the devil is using to try to tempt Jesus. But also, during all of their interactions, the devil is tossing in various hints and suggestions that, maybe, neither Jesus nor *God* is really up to the task of meeting Jesus' needs. And that, maybe, someone else, or *something* else, is.

In any event, I think the key to really understanding what's going on in our gospel reading, is coming to an understanding of the underlying nature of temptation itself. So, let's look at that.

Now, I would argue that the really bad thing about temptation, isn't necessarily the fact that it's trying to move us towards something, like doing something we shouldn't be doing. Rather, the really bad thing about temptation is the fact that it's trying to move us away from something; and specifically, I'm thinking about our relationship with God; a relationship through which we derive our identity as the children of God. That's the bad thing with temptation.

For example, did you notice, in our gospel reading, how in each of the temptations, the devil sought to undermine Jesus' confidence in his relationship with God — and thereby his identity — by prefacing at least two of the temptations with these words, "If you are the Son of God..." like that's a question still up for debate.

But, of course, Jesus realizes what's going on. And that's why, when the devil tempts him with bread, Jesus responds by affirming his relationship with God. And when the devil tempts him with all the world's power, Jesus responds by affirming the authority of God. And when the devil tries to tempt Jesus into testing the reliability of God, Jesus responds by affirming his absolute faith and trust in God.

And when it's explained like that, the pattern becomes pretty clear. First comes the temptation, designed to undermine Jesus' confidence in both God and himself. And then comes Jesus' response, which is to draw on the ancient and sacred stories of his faith, and claim his place in those stories, whereby he reaffirms his identity as a child of God. And by using scripture in that way, Jesus is able to be reminded that, in God, not only that he *has* enough, and that he *is* enough, but also that he is of infinite worth and value in the eyes of God.

Bread, power, and safety; those were the temptations in our gospel reading. But in another setting, those temptations could just as easily have been for youth, beauty, and wealth. Or confidence, fame, and security. Because, even though, on one level, we experience the various temptations differently, on another level, they are all the same. Because they all seek to shift our allegiance, our trust, and our confidence away from something, like God, and towards some meager substitute that promises the same, but can't really ever deliver.

And it's for that reason, that I think that the most basic theme of our gospel reading is (if you will) is that of *identity theft*. And it's not simply because of the devil's failed attempts to rob Jesus of his identity as a child of God, but because of all of the similar attempts to rob us of ours.

For example, consider all of the media barrage of advertising, to which all of us are subjected every day. I'd bet that the intentional goal of most of those ads is to create in us a sense of scarcity and inadequacy (which breeds fear), which is then followed by the implicit promise that purchasing their product will relieve our feelings of insecurity.

Or, when you consider the fact that we are entering into yet another presidential campaign season, try to imagine how most of those campaign ads are going to try create within us feelings of insecurity and fear. And the implicit, if not explicit, message of those ads will be “Elect me and I’ll keep you safe.”

And so, one of the good things about our gospel reading, is the fact that it reminds us that we are under assault every single day, by tempting messages that seek to draw our allegiance from God, and move us towards someone or something else. And, in response, we are called to remember the ancient stories of our faith; stories that remind us that God loves us more than anything else, and that we are God’s beloved children. I don’t think we can remind ourselves of this too often.

In the end, Lent is often seen as a time of self-denial, and sacrifice, and resisting temptation. And that’s and well and good. But might we also use this time to remind ourselves, and each other, of the love and grace of God poured out for us on the cross? And remind ourselves, and each other, that God indeed loves us all, and will keep on loving us no matter what? And for this reason, we are enough, because God is enough, and we are God’s children. Amen.