

The Journey into Inner Space

February 10, 2008

Burlingame UMC P. David Schlager

Luke 4:1-13

Romans 5: 12-21

Lent begins with this strange story
of the **temptation of Jesus in the desert.**

Jesus is led to the desert wilderness by the Spirit.
There **Satan tempts him for forty days and forty nights,**
with **temptations custom designed for a Messiah.**

The **first** is to **turn the stones into bread,**
to **dazzle people with miracles.**

The **second** is to **win the world**
by **selling his soul to the devil.**

The **third** is to **force God's hand**
by **jumping off the tower of the Temple,**
the **temptation of those who cannot trust God's way**
in our lives and in the world,
but want **God to act now according to our plans.**

Those are the **three temptations, according to Luke.**
I don't know about you, but they are **not my temptations.**

They are **all temptations to power.**
My temptations, generally speaking,
which is the only way
you are going to hear about my temptations,
are **not temptations to power,**
but **temptations to weakness.**

My temptation is *not to be more than I am, but to be less than I am.*

So I have trouble identifying with Jesus' temptations.

Then it occurred to me: the clue to reading the story of the Temptation
lies not in the content of the story itself,
but where it appears in the narrative.

It always comes up front,
whether it be in Matthew, Mark or Luke.
John doesn't have a story of the Temptation,
but Matthew, Mark and Luke do.

It always appears at the front of the Gospel,
right after Jesus' baptism
where the heavens open and God says,
"This is my Son in whom I am well pleased."

Then, *"immediately,"*
it is always the adverb *immediately,*
he is sent out into the desert
for forty days and forty nights, tempted by the devil.

That scene is always right up front, like a prologue.
It is the way Shakespeare introduced his tragic plays.
Right up front there would be a scene on the moors,
or in a castle, at midnight,
or the last watch of the night
when the night is its deepest and darkest,
when the fog comes in to enshroud the scene.
Then a ghost would appear,
or witches would be brewing up some mischief.

From that beginning scene in the play
you would get the idea that what we are about to see
is more complicated than meets the eye.

There will be a drama that's visible,
that's the play that is being acted out on the stage,
but there is also going to be an invisible drama,
the one that will be acted out inside of the hero.
In Hamlet, for instance, his family, his friends,
especially Ophelia, don't know what's come over Hamlet.
He is acting so strange they cannot figure it out.

But we know, because we have seen that prologue.

We have seen the ghost of his father in armor
come back to ask for revenge upon his death.

Maybe the Temptation scene in the Gospels is like that.

It is there, up front, like a prologue, to reveal that
*the Temptation was not so much an event that took place
for forty days in the desert,
but it was an inner struggle
that characterized Jesus' whole life.*

His life had a visible drama and an invisible drama.

The visible one begins right after the temptation stories.

*He goes back to Nazareth,
preached in his home church,
-calls his disciples, preaches to the multitudes,
feeds the crowds, heals those who are sick,
sails across the Galilean Sea, marches to Jerusalem,
dies upon a cross.*

That is the visible drama of his life.

We are all familiar with that.

But what the Temptation story is saying is that

*all this time there was an invisible drama,
an inner drama going on inside of him,
a constant and continuing temptation
with which he struggled every day of his life.*

Listen to the evidence.

At the end of the Temptation story

the devil, frustrated in his attempt

to seduce Jesus away from his mission, departs.

Luke says it this way,

"He departed to wait for a more opportune time."

What that means is that

*his temptations were not over. There would be more.
Temptation was going to return.*

It returns at Caesarea Philippi. Jesus reveals to the disciples
*that he's got to go to Jerusalem now, to be crucified,
and on the third day, rise from the dead.*

And Peter, good old impetuous Peter, calls out,
*"God forbid, don't let this happen to you, Jesus.
It's not going to happen."*

Do you remember what Jesus said to Peter?
It is terrible, really. He said,
"Get behind me Satan."

Luke says
he "rebuked" Peter,
which is the word that Jesus used to cast out demons.
He rebuked Peter, his friend.

*To be something other than who he was called to be,
who he was supposed to be,*
that was the content of the Temptation in the desert.
*To be something that contradicts who you really are.
To run away from
what you are suppose to be doing with your life.
To run away from responsibility.*

The devil departed and waited till a more opportune time.

He found that time in Caesarea Philippi. ... And listen to this.

He found that he could tempt our Lord
through our Lord's closest compatriot,
Peter, on whom he would build the Church.

Jesus, at the Garden of Gethsemane, says to his disciples,
"Pray that you enter not into temptation."

Then he, himself, goes off to pray,
*"Father, let this cup pass from me;
nevertheless, not my will but thine be done."*

Jesus is always going off by himself to pray.

Those are times of inner struggle in his life,
when he worked out this invisible drama.

*Temptation was not an isolated, single time event
at the beginning of his life.*

*Temptation was a constant, continuing struggle
every day of his life.*

That is the meaning of the story for us.

It means that he is like us.

The Letter to the Hebrews says that,

"In all ways he was tempted as we are tempted."

Hebrews might as well put it this way:

He was tempted all the time, ... just as we are tempted.

He was like us.

If the temptation in the wilderness is about Jesus' life,
then the temptation in the Garden of Eden is about our life.

It comes early on, as you know,
in the third chapter of the Book of Genesis,
the story of the Garden of Eden,

which means that

it comes at the beginning of the story of humankind.

The Garden of Eden is the prologue to our story.

If we are to interpret the temptation in the Garden story
the way we interpreted the temptation in the desert story,
it would mean

*that what happened to Adam and Eve
was not just an event back there*

*at the beginning of humankind, but it is a revelation
of what is happening in everybody's life.*

We are all Adam and Eve.

**We all start out life in innocence,
in "Gardens of Eden," if you will,
that are called childhood.**

**But at some point in time, at precisely that time,
I suspect, when Adam and Eve messed up their life,
we mess up our life. ... Every single one of us.**

Do you remember your Garden of Eden Story?

Do you remember your fall from Grace from innocence?

**My Garden of Eden was not in the middle east somewhere.
It was on College Avenue in Berkeley.**

**I was three or four years old. .. And I loved Root Beer.
Root beer was a joy. It was the closest thing to heaven
outside of my mother's arms.**

**She kept the bottles of *Dad's Root beer* on the back porch.
I had strict orders not to mess with glass bottles.
Because I could get hurt.**

It was a mystery to me how she got those bottle caps off.

**I never could figure out how grownups opened those bottles.
but one day I studied her carefully
and watched and learned.**

**And when she was practicing her piano I made my move.
I went in to the kitchen pulled out the bottle opener
and went on to the back porch.**

Hey those bottles open up real easy!

And before long I had drunk up at least 4 bottles.

**Mothers have a sixth sense... she must have known.
she came looking for me and found a four year old
covered in root beer and with empty bottles all around me.**

She said

Paul David Schlager what are you doing?

I was so startled I threw the bottle of root beer I was drinking
up in the air and it came down and shattered
all over the back steps.

Then I was off and running away from certain judgment.
Running in bare feet right through the broken glass.
The next thing I knew I was in the emergency room.
That was my first conscious sin and my exit from Eden.

For me Satan came to me in the form of a root beer bottle.
In the Garden the temptation there
is in the form of a snake.

In the desert Jesus gets Satan himself
But to tempt us, since it's no big deal, no problem at all,
he sends a representative,
and not a very impressive one at that.

He sends a snake, who beguiles Eve,
and Eve beguiles Adam,
which has led to the false conclusion
that Eve is to blame for all of this
because she had priority in the sequence of sin.

But what it really says is that
women have priority when it comes to leadership.
The snake knew who made the decisions in that family.

But followers are as culpable as leaders in any court of law.
I think it is called *being an accessory*,
that's what Adam was, an *accessory*.

But that is not the point of the story.
The point of the story is that
Adam and Eve had a choice
between putting themselves first and putting God first,
and they put themselves first.

Their temptation specifically was
to eat of the fruit of the tree
of the knowledge of good and evil,
which is the knowledge that belongs to God alone.
God is the one who determines
what is good and what is evil, not us.

In fact, God even told them.

*You can have anything that you want here in this paradise.
You can do anything you want, except eat that fruit.
The place is yours. It is a paradise and it is all yours.*

Here is the key.

*But the key is, remember who owns this place.
Remember who is in charge ...not you.*

That's the key to paradise for everyone.

Remember who you are. You are not God.

According to Genesis,

we couldn't accept the terms of that lease.

Remember, this is not an event that happened back there.

This is a revelation of
what is going on now in your life and in my life.

There is a public drama of our life,
that's what we show everybody else,
and there is a private drama to our lives.

This is a glimpse into that private life.
We can't let God run things.

We have to do it.

We have to be at the center, not God.

That is what got Adam and Eve

kicked out of the Garden of Eden, and us too,
and changed the world from a paradise to a wasteland.

Although you know don't you, that God created the Bay Area
so the world can see what it lost.

But besides that, the world is a wasteland.

Two temptations: one in a garden and the other in a desert.
one at the beginning of the story of our life,
one at the beginning of the story of Jesus' life.

In one, Adam and Eve say *yes* to temptation,
and we are lost.

And in the other, Jesus says *no* to temptation,
and we are saved.

Paul saw this graceful symmetry
between our life, as represented by Adam, and Jesus' life.

In his Letter to the Romans he calls Jesus
the second Adam,

and he describes our situation with this dazzling simplicity:

Adam got us into this mess, Jesus got us out.

He got us out by remembering who he was

and what God wanted him to do,

and by not yielding to the temptation

to be something other than who God wanted him to be.

Now the season of Lent invites us to renew our life
by going with Jesus out to the desert.

You can't go to the Garden, you know that.

You can't go back there.

Which means

you can't return to some previous state of innocence in your life

That is impossible.

To try to do so is a form of pathology. It is a delusion.

But people try to do that.

They live in a psychotic world when they do that.

They lose touch with reality,

because we are not allowed back there anymore.

Reality for them becomes so unbearable

that they retreat to a place of innocence,

and surround themselves with delusion.

But that is not the way of redemption.

That is the way of regression.

The way of redemption is to follow Jesus to the desert,
to face temptation, and say no.

The way that you go to the desert is to turn inward.

I know that Jesus went out to the desert to Sinai,
but you don't need to.

The desert of temptation is here, inside.

That is contrary to what many people think.

They believe that temptation lies out there in the world.

The Church taught that for centuries,
that temptation is in the world,

*so cloister yourself in religious environments
and you won't have temptation.*

That is not true.

Temptation is here, inside. That is where the struggle is.

The struggle is,

who is going to be the center of my life?

Am I going to continue to be the center or is God?

That is what those temptation stories are all about.

Richard Rohr, a wonderful teacher, Franciscan monk and retreat leader, suggests that
*the reason we have trouble with inwardness and contemplation
is because when we turn inward, all we find there is ourselves.*

He said,

that's our problem. We are full of self.

I remember someone said,

*if you can't be alone for fifteen minutes,
maybe you bore other people too.*

If you are so full of self, then there is no room for anyone else.

*And if you have no room in your life for anyone else,
then you have no room for God in your life.*

Rohr defines that the purpose of contemplation
as creating spaciousness.

It is a wonderful image. He calls it "holy spaciousness."

And he says

this is true of all religions.

*Every religion in the world practices contemplation,
and it is always the same.*

It is emptying the self in order to make room for God.

Jesus said *the person who would save his life is going to lose it,
but the person who loses his life, that is,
who empties himself of self, will find life.*

To lose your life is to empty yourself of the tyranny of ego
so that there is room in your life for somebody else.
Once you've got room in your life for someone else,
take that person into your life. *Love your neighbor.*

Then you will discover that

God has also come to be with you.

There is now room in your life for God.

That is not only true of all religions,
it has also been found in mythology
as interpreted by the psychologists

who say that

the ego is symbolized by the dragon.

To find life,

the hero has to slay the dragon.

In those old mythologies,

in order to slay the dragon the hero had to go to some far country

But the *journey is really inward,*

and Lent is the time when we invite you to make that journey
and to have your desert experience by emptying the self,
losing the self, in order to find your real self.

Practically speaking,
*that simply means to reduce the ego,
to dethrone it, so that there is room for God in your life.*

I know some people are going to object to that.
You are going to think that
what we are talking about here is "*putting yourself down.*"

But that is not what I am talking about.
There is a difference between putting yourself down
and humbling yourself.

I have been in this business long enough,
and more importantly,
I know myself well enough, to know that
*the person who puts himself down is full of the self,
just as much as the person who exalts himself.*

*People who think that they are worth nothing
have the same disease
as those who think that they are God's gift to the world.*

It is the same disease.
*We all have it. It is called "egocentricity,"
putting yourself at the center of the world.*

*We've all got it, the same disease.
Whether we think well of ourselves or poorly of ourselves,
it is just Type A and Type B of the same disease.*

You can't stop thinking about yourself.

You are full of self.

If you are full of self, there is no room for anyone else.

And if there is no room for anyone else,

there is no room for God.

We live in a time in which people seek
easy, cheap solutions to all problems,
and look for simple steps to happiness.

We find it in religion, as well,
where it has no place whatsoever.
Four spiritual laws, or something like that.
Or they say, just do this, just
...they use the word "*just*" meaning only...
just pray, or just ask,
as if it's that simple. Just do it.

It may be that simple for some,
but it may be more difficult for you.

For that reason, the Church said,
Look at Jesus.

*It took Jesus forty days of fasting and praying in order to say,
I am now ready to be who God wants me to be.*

He did that

*by taking a journey into inner space,
and there he emptied himself, until he could say,
in the words of the Gospel of John,
"The Father and I are now one."*

Amen.