

SO, THAT IS WHO YOU ARE

Luke 4:1-13 February 21, 2010

Pilgrim Bud Precise

I believe the text about wilderness temptation is about the identity of Jesus.

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit is led by the Spirit into the wilderness. There he is tempted 40 days by the devil. These are not temptations to do things that are desirable but not good for him (like our temptation to eat an extra piece of cake.) Satan wants to lure Jesus away from his focus, he wants a more comfortable Messiah. To feed the hungry. That is not a bad thing. "Jesus, be a new Moses – like feeding the Hebrews in the wilderness." Satan comes to Jesus, when he is hungry and he says, "If you are the Son of God, command the stones to become bread." Bread is good, but it is not sufficient to define the mission of Jesus. That is not the identity of Jesus.

The second test portrays Satan in the role of "Ruler of the world." In Jesus' day, Rome was heavy-handed in its control of most of the known world. Surely a "regime change" would be good for the world. Jesus sees right through this ploy. He quotes the Shema to let Satan know he is not really in control of the world – "Hear O Israel, the Lord is one." We would do well to mark that the world still promises us everything if we just give up who we are. Wants are presented to us as needs – and we are called to recognize that deceitful way of advertising. Jesus refuses to play the world's game that would cause him to risk serving something less than God.

The last test is the place where, presumably the most righteous – the priests – carry out their work. "Go there and test it out. Jump off the temple and see if God will save you." Again, Jesus refers to Dueteronomy "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." Jesus remains true to his identity. Satan has lost and goes away. Though Jesus refuses to turn stones into bread, he does feed the hungry. Though Jesus refused political power, the focus of his preaching is on God's Kingdom of justice and peace. Though Jesus refused to jump off the temple to see if God would send the angels to catch him, he goes to the cross with the confidence that God's will for his life, will be victorious.

Lent. Time for self examination. So, who are we? How do people identify us?

I met a professor at Saint Paul when I was in Kansas City to visit with Leigh and Pete. He greeted me with, "The first thing I told Leigh I was going to say to you was how proud you must be of Leigh!" He was right on. Of course he had little idea of how really proud I am of Leigh. But it is not bad being identifies as Leigh's daddy. I go to lunch with David and we meet someone who introduces me to others as "David's dad." Which is also great, as I am equally proud of David. One way people know us is biologically. We are in a certain family. That is one way people identify who we are.

Cultural. People know us that way. A friend emailed me to say his new company had Presidents day as a holiday. He mentioned that they do not have Good Friday as a holiday, then he added, "California is not the South." Cultural identity.

Us church folks understand ourselves theologically – in relation to God and to our neighbors. That is a list to be careful with. Psalm 8 says we are created just a little lower than the angels. Genesis says we are finite, limited creatures, sinful, little more than dust. Paul writes that we have gifts that we need to develop on

behalf of the world and the church, yet he also says we are only clay jars – susceptible to being cracked, broken. Biblical images are complex.

If we see ourselves, our identity, as only sinful and depraved in nature, it becomes easier to turn our education effort into indoctrination. We have to put this right thought into students. We have to make sure they behave properly. We have to instill into them the fear of the Lord. We just stay in control at all times. Regulations and rules become very important.

However, if we see ourselves, our identity, - while being limited, fallible, and sinful – as created in the image of God and full of potential and possibility – we are free to explore, question, try new things, to be open to the movement of the Spirit in our midst. I believe this is the way we discover our true identity.

Of course we are taught all this stuff at a young age. Remember the routine of the song we learned as children. “This is the way we wash our clothes – all on Monday morning. This is the way we iron our clothes – all on Wednesday morning.” I don’t remember all the song, but we were taught this routine as children.”

Lent is a matter of examination – a matter of seeing how we stand with God and with each other. There are several ways to look at examination. A teacher comes in and says – “Take our paper and pen – a pop quiz.” Really. Anxiety. Apprehension. How would we measure up? But testing is not limited to pointing out what is wrong with us or how we have failed. Examination also helps us see what is right with us, how we are succeeding. Evaluation helps us fix value and worth. Our Lenten evaluation is intentional. It is not some pop quiz thrust upon us. It is an endeavor of self examination. How we see ourselves is important mortar that helps hold the foundation of our lives together.

A popular notion of Lent is that we must “give up something.” People often ask, “What are you giving up for Lent?” We could make a long list – soft drinks, red meat, sweets, maybe excess TV watching or internet browsing. Maybe Lent is not as much a giving up of something as it is taking upon ourselves the intention or receiving God’s grace so that we may participate in this mystery of God-With-Us. Intentionally in our prayers, our scripture meditation, our acts of piety- lent is a good time to remember that our baptism has identified who we are.

Jesus refused to accept the bait of Satan who did not really understand the scriptures. Jesus shows us the importance of turning toward God, rather than turning away during our trials and temptations. Our Lenten examination calls us to be intentional. It is to lead us to be receptive to the grace of God. In our journey during Lent, we will encounter a God that not only comes to us when we are in the wilderness, but we will encounter a faithful God who leads us through the wilderness.

Remember our words of response to the scriptures today.

“Take us by the hand and lead us,
Lead us through the desert sands,
Bring us living water,
Holy Spirit, come.