

Student

CONCORD
SUNDAY
SCHOOL

LECTIONARY
LESSON 9

SUNDAY,
MARCH 1,
2020

image: interrupting the silence

Matthew 4:1-11 NRSV

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. 3 The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” 4 But he answered, “It is written,

‘One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 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.’”

7 Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; 9 and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” 10 Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

‘Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.’”

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

Background

We are shifting into the gospels for the season of Lent. Lent is the forty days before Easter when many Christians observe a season of intentional prayer and fasting. In the gospel of Matthew right before this vignette of temptation, Jesus had just been baptized. Temptation comes immediately after God says, “this is my son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Today’s lesson will focus on **creating sustainable and healthy habits.**

Read the scripture out loud together.

Discuss with a partner. Are there habits you struggle with? You don’t have to name them if you’re not comfortable. What usually makes you crave those habits?

What’s happening during this passage?

Jesus has just been baptized. God said “this is my son, in whom I am well pleased.” Jesus is led by the spirit into the wilderness and meets the devil. For a period of 40 days and 40 nights, he desired food, drink, companionship and rest. The tempter pressured him to prove himself and turn the stones to bread, but Jesus replied “man shall not live on bread alone.” A second time, the devil tempted Jesus to throw himself from the highest point of the temple. His logic was, “if you are truly the son of God, angels will surround you.” And the last temptation was a demonstration of all “the kingdoms of the world and their splendor” if Jesus would bow to him. Jesus resisted, and the devil left him. The angels then came to attend to him.

Why Lent?

Many (not all) Christians observe Lent as a way to get back on track spiritually. It is an intentional season of resisting the temptations of the world and replacing un-

healthy obsessions with the love of God. For some, it is non-essential spending. For others, it is alcohol or meat. Others add to their routine instead of subtracting. Some may commit to exercise, reading, prayer, or intentional family time.

Sadly, this observance *can* become obsessive and restrictive. Sometimes, the point of the season gets lost. It is not a way to shed pounds fast. It is not a season that should be used for fad diets. We intentionally resist the death-dealing temptations of the world and turn our faces towards Christ.

Why forty days and forty nights?

As we saw last week, Moses was on the mountain for this amount of time. Forty days and forty nights is a period often used in Biblical stories. It rained for this amount of time during the Great Flood. Jesus fasted for this amount of time. It is a significant chunk of time. Psychologists and behavioral scientists argue that in order to make a habit stick, one needs to keep it up for a minimum of 21 days. 21 days of discipline can make a habit stick. The time that Jesus spent resisting the devil helped Jesus build his muscle of integrity. Jesus could resist temptation that would later come in his ministry because of this intentional season of reflection.

When does temptation usually occur?

It is easy to lose integrity when we have just been praised. God just publicly named pride in Jesus at the baptism. Sometimes when we have received many accolades, it is easy to rest on our laurels.

It is also easy to lose integrity when our immediate needs are not met. Food, rest, sleep, water and human companionship are human needs. Jesus did not have any of these things in the wilderness. With the help of God, he was able to resist the temptation three separate times.

What questions do you still have of this scripture? How will you commit to journeying with this text this week?



Connection to Today's World

At a very lavish dinner at the White House in 1968, Eartha Kitt was an invited guest of Lady Bird Johnson. The subject of the luncheon was “why is there so much juvenile delinquency in America?” Angered by the roses, champagne and polite talk in the room, Kitt spoke up. “You send the best of this country off to be shot and maimed. They rebel in the street. They will take pot and they will get high. They don’t

want to go to school because they’re going to be snatched off from their mothers to be shot in Vietnam. Because there is a war on and I pray that there will be a just and honest peace — that still doesn’t give us a free ticket not to try to work for better things such as against crime in the streets, for better education and better health for our people.” Eartha Kitt lost a lot for this testimony. She was disinvited from paid work, auditions did not reply back to her, clubs refused to return calls. Newspapers proclaimed that this rebellious Black woman “made Lady Bird Johnson cry.”

Still, Eartha Kitt stood her ground. Though she was tempted to keep her mouth shut, or even to not attend in the first place, she knew that she was accountable to something bigger than herself. Having integrity will often cost us. What do we do to fortify ourselves as we do the difficult thing?

Journal: What are the conditions that trigger your temptation? How can you anticipate those moments?

Closing: Sing “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.”

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged
Take it to the Lord in prayer

Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness
Take it to the Lord in prayer

Prayer:

Dear God,

You are the God who bids us to come to the mountain every so often. We thank you for the challenge of Lent.

It is so hard to focus on worshipping you when we are otherwise distracted. We ask that you give us even this hour today to leave our burdens at the altar. We pray that we are able to be fully present in the worship hour this morning and beyond.

As we journey through this Lenten season with you, be gentle to us. Open up the gates we’ve hidden behind. Help us to emerge changed and more whole through this season.

In Jesus’ name we pray,

Amen

Works Cited

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2018/01/19/sex-kitten-vs-first-lady-eartha-kitt-yells-at-lady-bird-johnson-about-vietnam/>