

Sermon for Sunday – February 26 – Lent 1 – Matthew 4:1-11

**Prayer:** May the words of my mouth and the wonderings of our minds reveal your wisdom in our time, God of life and light. Amen

One of the joys of the ministry, that you have given me, is that I have the opportunity to have meaningful conversations with a variety of people. This week I was blessed to sit down with Kabrienne and Merlin – Edwin’s parents – Edwin was present for this conversation but he was not much into sitting down. As we 3 adults did our best to keep Edwin from bonking his head on the coffee table and pulling the plug from the electrical socket in the Gathering room - we managed to have a really lovely conversation. Kabrienne and Merlin are a very thoughtful couple and it was my privilege to hear about their journey to finding a faith community in the new city that they now live. They told me that they have had the opportunity to be invited to a few of those big churches – the ones with all the bells and whistles - bouncy castles in the parking lot and baristas in the lobby, with loads of young families bubbling about. And while it was exciting to be amongst many young families they recognized that not everyone would be welcome. Therefore, their search for a church home continues – they want to be a part of a faith community that welcomes everyone – they want their son to grow up – as they did – part of a church family that does its best to welcome all people regardless of identity, orientation, economic place, ethnicity, or ability. I am inspired by the **integrity** of this young couple and I pray they find that church home not only for themselves but also for Edwin.

It seems to me that our scripture lesson this morning has something to say about **integrity** about leaning into what we believe and know about God and, in the face of difficult choices, standing our ground.

The gospel writer Matthew tells us that the first challenge that Jesus faced, after being in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights, a number that is significant in Hebrew and Christian scriptures, is one of proving his worth by producing a meal for himself out of stones. Jesus is challenged by the tempter to make bread; “if you are the son of God command these stones to become loaves of bread”, but Jesus answers; “it is written one does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

The tempter is pointing out to Jesus that if he truly believes he is God's son then he should be able to take - an innate object – a stone – and turn it into something useful. The tempter is telling Jesus - that to be great one needs to be useful – one needs to produce something. The suggestion is that if you want to get anywhere in this world you must show results, be effective. The problem is that this is the language of an economic system of production. When we focus on producing results the temptation is to value a human's worth based on what they can do for the rest of us. The problem is that this kind of thinking forgets about those who no longer work, the sick, the poor, the immigrant, those without homes, children. Jesus knows that God's mandate is to take care of the vulnerable ones.

How easily do we fall into the tempters way of thinking – believing that our value is found in our productivity. How many of us work like crazy to prove we valuable. You know that bumper sticker “Jesus is coming back look busy.” Usefulness becomes equated with holiness. We in the church often get caught up in this way of thinking. We count our success by counting the number of programs we offer or the number of people sitting in the chairs on Sunday morning and we forget that our worth is found - in the

way we live out our call to act justly and live with compassion. Our value is found in the way we reflect God's love in the world not in what we produce.

The second challenge that Jesus faces builds on the first - not only must we be productive, but we must also be amazing. When the tempter took Jesus to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple the tempter said; "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;" And Jesus said to the tempter, "again it is written do not put the Lord your God to the test."

The tempter is saying to Jesus stand out in the crowd. Be excellent. Be outstanding. Be gifted. Be above average, - because heaven knows, no one should just be average. These are the mandates of our competitive contemporary society. These are not God's values. God's values are rooted in our created beauty. There is beauty and greatness in the wild flower, the caterpillar, the precocious child, and in the wise elder. Greatness looks different in God's realm. And Jesus knows this.

Lastly Jesus is tempted to believe that he ***can have it all***. The tempter takes him to a very high mountain and shows him all the kingdoms of the world and the tempter says, to Jesus, "all these I will give to you if you will fall down and worship me." And Jesus says to the tempter, "away with you for it is written worship the Lord your God and serve God only."

The truth is we can't have it all and we don't need to have it all. We can't have our proverbial cake and eat it too not at least without some cost to our mental, physical, or spiritual health or the health of our planet. The earth's natural resources are limited. Our work and careers will come to an

end. Our children will grow up and need us less. What we have ebbs and flows.

We tell our kids that they can be anything they want to be. Yet, many young adults tell us that, what was intended to be encouragement to them, has backfired. They see that there really are no guarantees, and sometimes it doesn't work, and they cannot be what they want to be, and so they are left with a lifetime of disappointment and self doubt. We have spent years teaching our children that they **can be** something more when they already **are** something precious. God teaches us that we are beloved as we are – we are enough. The hope is **not to become** happy or content in life but rather **to be happy** and content in life. God knows us to be enough.

Friends you and I are tempted every day to measure the goodness of our lives based on the world's - or the tempters - definitions of what is good and right and successful. What I hear in today's gospel lesson is that we must firmly plant our feet, our souls, our living, in the definitions of what is good and right and successful that God has shown us. That, as individuals and even as a church, our decisions must be grounded in God, in Jesus way of love.

We can question our identity from one day to the next, letting our worth be dependent upon how many affirmations or accolades we receive; we can allow ourselves to be tossed to and fro by our perception of how others feel about us; we can constantly measure our self-worth against arbitrary standards that shift regularly; **or...or...**we can feast on the truth that our core identity cannot be stolen by any hackers. Just like Jesus, we each have a promise given to us at Baptism: we belong to God. God has redeemed us and proclaims that we are children in whom God is well

pleased. And it is from this firm place that we will face what the world offers up.

Children of God, let us stand firm. Amen.