

# BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

## THE WORSHIP OF GOD • MARCH 10, 2019

### Psalm Litany

Based on Psalm 91

You who live and abide in the shelter of the Holy One will say to the Lord,

**Our refuge and fortress, our God in whom we trust.**

For God will deliver you and give you rest under the shelter of mighty wings.

**Our refuge and fortress, our God in whom we trust.**

Let us profess the things that divide our souls:

**When you have loved us, we have forgotten you and become distracted  
and attracted to all else. Bring us back, turn us toward you,  
that we may know the peace that passes all understanding.**

### The Scripture

Luke 4:1-13

*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.*

### The Message

***Enough Is Enough***

**Nick Larson**

The nature of evil, the nature of Christ, the power of temptation, are all dripping from this text. Each has been named, over time, as the possible themes for this powerful kick-starter text for Lent. The first two verses alone suggest possibilities where evil is personified in the devil, the temptation lasts 40 days. It's all there.

No wonder then, when Rev. Lori Brandt Hale, tells this tale of her gregarious middle son – just shy of four years old – who encountered this very text in his Worship and Wonder class, where he learned of these themes, especially temptation.

How extremely dramatic that telling of this very text must have been to truly capture the imagination of her almost four-year-old, because later that day he said, “Hey Mom, what do you know about the devil?” Immediately she began to think of all the large and theological responses she could offer him, and then remembered, when she looked at him again and remembering that he was three.

“What do you know about the devil?” she keenly replied. His response was instructive. “Well,” he began, “the devil talked to Jesus.” Good she thought, he was paying attention.

“The devil was mean,” he continued. Mean. She began to wonder about the relationship between mean and evil. What is the difference between mean and evil? Was the devil really mean? Perhaps it is possible to be mean, without being evil, but is the opposite true? Or did the beloved children’s leader just decide that her young audience might understand mean in a way that they could not comprehend evil? Her musing was cut short by her son continuing his hand-me-down exposition of the text.

Leaning closer to her and dropping his voice to a loud whisper, he said, “If we were at the store, and you and Dad were in the other aisle, and I was in another aisle, and” – his hushed tones became downright conspiratorial at this point – “there was candy...” He paused for effect. “The devil would say, ‘You should take some!’”

She wasn’t sure what was most startling to her in this retelling of our text this morning by her three-year old: that he could, in fact, retell it – especially in such dramatic fashion – or that the version he had learned placed heavy emphasis on the temptation and the personified temper.

She had always thought the story turns in verse 8, in which Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy: “Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.” With that in mind, she started to respond to her son’s statement about obedience to God.

And yet, then it occurred to her. Maybe her little boy – who had already taken in so much – understood that very point already. So, she asked him. “Honey, if we were at the store, and Dad and I were in another aisle, and there was candy, and the devil said, ‘You should take some!’ What would you say back to the devil?”

A genuinely sweet grin crossed that little boys face, lighting up his face, and without hesitation he replied, “Oh! I would say, Thank You!”

It's not surprising that a three-year-old missed the point, but lots of us miss the same point all the time. It is far easier than not for us to say, "Thank you," when temptation comes calling. However, the story is only partly about temptation. Today's text is also a story about Jesus' choice – and ours – to be responsive to God. To respond to God by saying what God has already given us is enough.

Maybe one day her son will be able to understand the difficult idea that the way of God is simultaneously the way of obedience and the way of freedom. Personally, I feel a lot closer to her three-year-old.

The act of enough, seeing our own internal lives and the lives we have worked with alongside of God's blessing for us is difficult. It's a discipline. Discipline according to the beloved Henri Nouwen is "to prevent everything in your life from being filled up. Discipline means that somewhere you're not occupied, and certainly not preoccupied. In the spiritual life, discipline means to create that space in which something can happen that you hadn't planned or counted on."

The rhythm established in the temptations of the wilderness were over the 40 days and nights of discipline that required of Jesus to turn back this personified evil. I tend to think about the personified devil as a shadow version of ourselves. Our own face, staring back at us, urging us to be selfish, conceited, and arrogant.

Jesus shows us what we often miss, that self-knowledge and self-reliance in the face of temptation creates strength where there seems to be only weakness.

Jesus listened to that still, small voice of God all the time, and he was able to walk right through life. While this evil promised him gluttony, gain, and glory, but amid it, Jesus trusted the one thing – I am beloved; I am God's chosen one. He must have clung to that voice.

There are many voices speaking – loudly:

"Prove that you are the beloved." "Prove that you are worth something." "Prove that you have any contribution to make." "Be sure to make a name for yourself." "At least have some power – then people will love you; then people will say you're wonderful, you're great."

These voices are so strong in the world.

These were the voices Jesus heard after he heard the voice telling him, "You are my beloved."

Another voice said, "Prove you are the beloved. Do something. Change these stones

into bread. Be sure you're famous. Jump from the temple, and you will be known. Grab some power, so you have real influence. Isn't that why you came?"

Jesus said, "No, I don't have anything to prove. I am already beloved."

When thinking of the start of Lent, I'm always reminded of the Rembrandt painting, that we have a print of hanging in the office, of the return of the lost son. It's of the father holding his son, holding his daughter, and touching his son and his daughter, where I imagine him saying, *"You are my beloved. I'm not going to ask you any questions. Wherever you have gone, whatever you have done, and whatever people say about you, you're my beloved. I hold you safe in my embrace. I touch you. I hold you safe under my wings. You can come home to me whose name is Compassionate, whose name is Love."*

If we can keep that in mind, we can deal with an enormous amount of success as well as an enormous amount of failure without losing our identity, because our identity is that we are God's beloved.

Long before your father and mother, your brothers and sisters, your teachers, your church, or any people touched you in a loving as well as in a wounding way – long before you were rejected by some person or praised by somebody else – that voice has been there always.

"I have loved you with an everlasting love."

That love is there before you were born and will be there after you die.

Rev. Lee Hull Moses tells this story that I think exemplifies this concept. She tells about the time she gave up. Optimistically when she bought her last house, she wanted to start a garden to grow some tomato plants, some lettuce, some basil. She never fancied herself as the type of person, who would ever make her own clothes. However, she was determined to find some level of self-sufficiency, so she thought why not try to grow just some of her own food.

She took a class, read a few books, checked out the local foods, and scouted the local farmers market. And when she moved into her house, she built a couple of raised garden beds and began planting. She was especially excited about the tomatoes – she had visions of those thick slices on bread and small grape tomatoes with pasta. She imagined the surplus to share with the neighbors.

Let's just say it did not go particularly well. The plants grew – they were tall and full and green; they just didn't produce much fruit. When there was a tiny cucumber or pepper starting to grow, a bird or a squirrel would make off with it, and she'd find it half eaten

in the driveway the next day. Or something would eat the plants themselves; one morning she came out to find the tomatoes completely decimated, all the plants broken off at the stem.

Optimistically, she tried for several seasons in a row, always hoping that the year before had been a fluke, that this would be the season when they'd get it right. Finally, last year, they scaled back to just a few plants and that year finally those few tomato plants finally yielded exactly one tiny handful of cherry tomatoes. No juicy slices, not enough for pasta, none worth sharing.

So, the next year, she gave up. As it turns out, she's not particularly good at growing things. Maybe she told herself, that she wasn't patient enough or she was too busy with other things. Whatever the reason, it seemed that her thumb was just not that green.

And while that year the overgrown bed taunted her, she dug them out and planted some flowers. She told herself that, she can't do her job, and keep up with the laundry and take their daughter to swim practice, and toilet train their son, and grow tomatoes, too.

But then a member of her church – the coordinator of their church-garden-ministry and an excellent gardener himself – got wind of her forfeit and decided perhaps her thumb could be turned green with a little encouragement.

She found out that she may not be great at growing things. She is, however, reasonably capable of receiving gifts, especially in the form of a giant already flowering abundantly healthy cherry tomato plant, dropped off on her front porch. He had pulled a volunteer plant up from the ground where it had sprouted from seeds dropped by last year's fruits, potted it in rich soil, put a tomato cage around it, and then wrapped the whole thing in netting to keep out the critters. "I'll drop it off tomorrow," he said when he called. "All you have to do is keep it watered."

So far, so good. A few were ripe the next day, and soon she was swimming in cherry tomatoes. She tells that story and then says, "I'm not sure which I appreciate more; the tomatoes themselves, the encouragement to keep trying, or the reminder that we're all in this together, each doing what we know how to do and sharing the fruits of our labors."

Sometimes what we really need to realize that we have already been given enough, is to accept that we don't have to do it on our own and receive the gifts that are brought to us.

We should remember that even though Jesus was alone in the wilderness facing his tempter, he was not alone.

And neither are we.

We all have wounds. We all are in so much pain. It is precisely this feeling of loneliness that lurks behind all our successes, that feeling of uselessness that hides under all the praise, that feeling of meaninglessness even when people say we are fantastic – that is what makes us sometimes grab for the candy bar. Grab onto other people and expect from them an affection and love they cannot give.

Our shadow self, our tempter, asks for something that only God can give, and when we do, we become a demon. We say, “Love me!” and before you know it, we become violent, and demanding, and manipulative. It’s so important to keep forgiving one another – not once in a while but every moment of life.

Resistance is about being known in your vulnerability, and impatience, and weakness. It’s about realizing that God calls us to lives of enough.

Resentment makes you cling to your failures and disappointments and complain about the losses ...especially the loss of hope. Around every corner and down every aisle, there is always our shadow selves lurking, asking us to respond to these incredible pains in resentment.

In this crazy world, there’s an enormous distinction between good times and bad, between sorrow and joy. But in the eyes of God, each and all can be redeemed.

Jesus promise, “Cry over your pains, and you will discover that I am right there in your tears, and you can find gratitude for my presence in your weakness.”

Discipline is required in leading a fruitful life. Discipline helps us live that fruit-filled life. Yet, with God we can already have enough.

A popular notion of the season of Lent is that we must “give up something.” We are often asked, “What are you giving up for Lent?” Various responses are expected: red meat, sweets, or perhaps excess television, or Netflix binging. Perhaps, we need to give up that simplistic notion of Lent. Liturgical scholars Hickman, Saliers, Sooke, and White write, “Lent is thus not giving up something but rather taking upon ourselves the intention and receptivity to God’s mystery of God-with-us.”

Jesus’ intentionality and his receptivity to grace shows us the way to turn towards God, rather than run away from God, during our trials and temptations. It’s about realizing that God calls us to lives of enough.

## **Benediction**

Yet remember, that in Jesus' successful completion of the tests, though he refused to turn stones into bread, he does go on to feed the hunger. Though he refused political power, the proclamation of God's empire of justice and peace is his focus. Though he refused to jump off the temple to see if God would send angels to catch him, he goes to the cross in confidence that God's love will trump the world's decision to execute him.

Go forth with the grace of God, the love of Christ, and the power of your holy companion this day and forever more. Go in peace. Amen.