

Karen Hollis
Sermon
1st Sunday in Lent
Luke 4:1-13

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Um

Do you ever feel drawn to something that seems irresistible? Does it call your name even though it isn't necessarily good for you? Sometimes I hear something speaking directly to me . . . it tells me sweet little lies, insisting it will make me feel happy. These things look so attractive at first, though I often regret saying yes in the end . . . why am I so tempted? Why do I do it even though I don't feel good in the end? Why do I do it and then do it again? Because it's easier to do it than not do it . . . because for a fleeting moment I feel happy or momentarily it fills a deep seeded longing in me. Once I've done the thing that I crave, I feel icky. I heard the voice that said it'll be so great, you deserve it, you've earned it and it will feel so good, and I said, you're right!

Each of us has things that tempts us, whether they're relatively insignificant when you look at the grand scheme of things, like my craving of cheese even though I'm allergic . . . or something more consequential.

Why are we wired for doing things that aren't good for us? Why are we tempted? Why is it that the thing that creates a problem for us is the exact thing we crave?

Sometimes it feels more like a test of the strength of our character . . . exactly in the places that matter to us most. It's like there's a lightening rod of learning fashioned just for us . . . and in a moment we have to make a choice.

I'm not sure the way the story is told in Luke gives us a good appreciation for what Jesus went through during those 40 days. Jesus seems to be composed and centered, ready for each question with the appropriate rebuttal. Imagine him having this conversation with the devil inside his head, like many of these conversations happen for us . . . imagine he's been fasting for a week and doesn't know how long it will go on.

If we are tested at the places that matter most to us:

perhaps the physical hunger Jesus feels exacerbates his spiritual longing, telling him lies that he will feel better if he is just able to eat;

perhaps he knows he would make a great king and if he so chose, all he would need to do is reach out and take it, that path is also available to him;

perhaps his faith in God is so strong he can see exactly how the angels would protect him if he gave in to recklessness;

perhaps with each question he feels himself riding the fence of choice. He's hungry, living out in the elements for 40 days. Still, given that he is Jesus, we have this expectation that this is easier for him than it is for us.

Maybe it is . . . maybe it's not easier for him.

We live this story of temptation and are all challenged at various times to show or develop our true character. Jesus isn't different from us and didn't come to show us how easy it

is to be faced with ourselves and our values . . . he shows us in this story the resources we can draw on in these moments.

Did you notice it's the Spirit who leads him into the wilderness – like a rite of passage as Jesus enters ministry. And you'll also notice the Spirit doesn't leave him there alone. Jesus also has with him the faith he has developed since he was a boy. Jesus would have attended the local synagogue school at the age of 5 to learn Hebrew and memorize the Torah. By the time of his bar mitzvah, he would have been completely conversant with God's Word;¹ even as a teenager Jesus didn't just know scriptures by rote, he was responsible for considering their meaning, analyzing them and living them. The devil, on the other hand, seems to take the verses out of context, stretching their intent, to which Jesus finds the reply, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." Jesus knows the scriptures as an extension of himself, as a tool, as protection, as consolation, as a window into God.

¹ <http://preservingbibletimes.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Reflection.Follow-Me.pdf>

We are not meant to go through any of life by ourselves, let alone critical moments in the wilderness. In these character building moments, how do you identify and access your resources? How do remember to reach for God? How do you prepare, knowing these moments will present themselves?

I was quite moved when I saw the movie about Jackie Robinson, the first African American baseball player in the major league. In the film the owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers invites Jackie to join their organization, knowing the devil is watching . . . the devil is racism . . . the devil is segregation. The question is, can Jackie keep his temper in check. Jackie asks the owner, "You want a player who doesn't have the guts to fight back?" The owner replies, "No, I want a player who has the guts not to fight back. The enemy will be out there doing everything possible to get you to react, to prove that you don't belong there. The devil will be out in force; you cannot meet him on his own low ground. Like our saviour, you have to have the guts to turn the other cheek." The devil shows up in the place where Jackie's call

to play baseball intersects with a culture that is deeply invested in the lies it has been told for generations. The devil is powerful . . . Jackie is not more powerful . . . Jackie is human. But God is more powerful, and God works moment to moment in the life of Jackie Robinson, in those who support him and come around to standing in his corner, in the life of baseball and in the life of a nation. The people in the story know this is not Jackie's fight; it is a collective fight . . . he's just the lightning rod in this slice of a larger story. They all succeed in changing the conversation from race to baseball because the Spirit of Truth is more powerful than the darkness that has ruled for so long. Truth is enduring; Truth plays the long game, like love of God that serves as its foundation. It often feels like that foundation is not in us or under us, but God's got us, we just need to reach out or reach in for however we access God in our moment of need.