

In The name of Our Creator
The Son Our Saviour and Redeemer And
The Triune Spirit Who is With Us Always.

NOTES

The gospel-storytellers place the story of Jesus temptation in the wilderness immediately following his baptism. Baptism was and is a public act; a sort of declaration of intent to be a certain kind of person. Jesus is about to step into his life as a public teacher. Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist who preached a baptism of repentance; repentance means to turn around, to turn from the direction you've been going, to turn around toward God so that you might live in God, recognizing that God lives in you. No sooner does Jesus engage in this public act which sets him up as a committed follower of YAHWEH in a world where committed followers of YAHWEH were hanging on crosses all over the place; no sooner does Jesus set himself up against the powers-that-be than he is driving by the Spirit into the wilderness where the personification of evil, Satan himself pays Jesus a visit for the sole purpose of enticing Jesus to follow Satan and not YAHWEH. Isn't that always the way?

Each and every time we resolve to follow one path, someone or something comes along and entices us to follow another.

When that someone is the personification of Evil himself, well who else would be up to the task of tempting Jesus other than Satan himself. The gospel - between good and evil. Our very lives write large upon the canvass of the heavens themselves, cause you know the big guy up in the sky and all the heavenly host will be watching this one; just as they tune in each and every time we are come face to face with the choice between good and evil. What better way to begin a season, which encourages contemplation, repentance, and confession?

Woe is me, the good that I would do, I don't do. The bad that I shouldn't do, well that is so appealing that, of course I do do it. Woe is me. For I am a wicked fallen creature. Forgive me so I can try again, even though we all know that the temptation to sin will come again and I am in bondage to sin and cannot free myself. Woe is me. Woe is me. Woe is me.

I know, I'll give up chocolate, say a few prayers, and I'm off to see the wizard the wonderful wizard of OZ, because, because, because, Jesus loves me, and there's a big cross coming at the end of Lent and I want to be ready to party come the resurrection. But what if we look beyond the words? What if we see Satan as more than the simple personification of evil? What if we see Jesus as more than the simple personification of good? What if we see ourselves as more than simply the tempted who are doomed to fail? What if we actually followed Jesus into the wilderness? What will we find in the wilderness? In our individual wildernesses? In our collective wilderness? What temptations lurk waiting to lure us off the path we have chosen?

Let's begin with our collective wilderness. We are good, loving, intelligent people. We want to create a world where everyone can live in peace. We all want to create a world where no child goes hungry and everyone has a roof over their heads. We all want justice for our people and for all people even our enemies. None of us want to be a part of systems that corrupt, abuse, and oppress. If it were up to us, there would be no bombs, no war, and no need

for crime, prisoners would be treated and re-educated and transformed into model citizens. We are good people and we want to do good. But in our wilderness, we encounter temptations that are bigger than our resolve, fears that send us back into old patterns, which keep us trapped in institutions whose systems exploit, abuse, oppress, kill, and wage war. We are all good people. We are all trapped in systems that perpetrate evil. It is as if we are doomed to be in league with the devil.

Our wildernesses are dark and deep and we have promise to keep, no time to look where we don't want to see, eyes front, move along, get it done, don't look too deeply or you'll fall from a great height. What if we looked beyond the words Jesus and Satan, beyond the words good and evil, beyond our dualisms, to the reality of what it means to be human in a creation that continues to evolve? Beyond our dualisms toward the reality of what is, and beyond what is to what could be?

Beyond, the beyond to the Reality that lies at the heart of all that is?

We are not good or evil. Creation is not good or evil. The world is not good or evil. Our enemies are not good or evil. Yes, there is good and evil in us. Yes, there is good and evil in creation. Yes, there is good and evil in the world. Yes, our there is good and evil in our enemies.

The question is not about a choice between good and evil. The QUESTIONS are much more complex.

Sometimes we need to change our questions in order to see beyond the limitations we have drawn around where we can go and who we can become.

Try these questions as a response to evil. Instead of asking why is there evil? Or where does evil come from? Is this person evil or good? Or is that thing evil or good? Try asking: How does integrity face oppression? What does honesty do in the face of deception? What does decency do in the face of insult? How does virtue meet brute force? It is so very tempting to stay out in the wilderness. In the wilderness we can pray, we can reflect, we can confess, we can wallow in woe is me, woe is me, and wring our hands and shout at the devil and fall down on our knees in despair because the problems are bigger than us, and what can we hope to accomplish. Sure, we can remain in the wilderness bereft of hope and we can die in the wilderness. Or like Jesus we can move beyond the wilderness. We can pick ourselves up and dust ourselves off and head toward Galilee because there are people to meet, places to go, things to do, hungry to feed, oppression to fight, wars to end.

Systems to engage, people to love, lives to save, worlds to change, life to live.

I don't know about you but before I become food for worms, there are things I can do, love I can give, systems I can engage, votes I can make, money I can give, lives I can nurture, truths I can tell, people I can feed, oppression I can stand against, pain I can ease, crosses I can bear. We have been blessed with a

vision of the future where everyone has enough, where love abounds, that vision itself is a blessing bestowed on us so that we might be a blessing to others. But first, we have to have the courage to go into the wilderness and face our demons. Some of those demons we can face together some of them we must face alone. But face them we must, so that we can see the evil that

belongs to us, the evil that we are caught up in, and the evil that threatens to overwhelm us.

How does integrity face oppression?

What does honesty do in the face of deception?

What does decency do in the face of insult?

How does virtue meet brute force?

Let us take courage from all those who have gone before us in faith.

Let us take courage from one another.

Let us respond to all our many blessings and to evil with:

Integrity not Cupidity

Honesty not Mendacity

Decency not Indifference

Virtue not Venality