

“And He Was Hungry”

February 10, 2008

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Matthew 4:1-11

Each week as I begin to make preparations for the sermon, the very first thing I do is read the scripture and see if there is any new insight--a new truth that perhaps God will reveal in the reading of the scripture. When I did that this past week, the one thing that stood out to me were the words, “and he was hungry.” It’s not surprising, I suppose, that after 40 days one might be a little hungry, but I thought of something far more important, something about the humanity of Jesus as well as our own humanity.

In the church, we have struggled with what it meant for Jesus to be human. Some persons would say it is heresy to say that Jesus was human, but in fact, much of the Bible, especially the first part of John’s Gospel, was written to address a heresy that said Jesus was not human. If Jesus did not get hungry after not eating for 40 days, there was something different about him.

If you play any kind of cards, you know that in a card game everyone gets the same number of cards; there’s the same number of cards in the deck. If Jesus was able to go for 40 days without eating and not get hungry, he is playing some cards that the rest of us just don’t have. But, he did get hungry. Hunger is not a bad thing. In fact, hunger is a good thing. Not just for food. I visit persons in nursing homes who have no appetite for food because they have lost their appetite for life! They don’t want to eat because they don’t want to live. So it wasn’t a bad thing that Jesus was hungry.

I came across some wonderful words by the woman who was here a few months ago standing in this pulpit--Barbara Brown Taylor. She was comparing the temptation of Jesus to the temptation of Moses. She wrote these words that I find helpful. It says something not only about the humanity of Jesus, but also about our own humanity. Taylor says,

“Whereas Adam stepped over the line and found humanity a curse, Jesus stayed behind the line and made humanity a blessing.”
Don’t you love that? “One man trespassed, one man stayed put. One tried to be God, one was content to remain a human being. The irony is that the one who tried to be God did not do too well as a human being while the one who was content to be human became known as the Son of God.

“They are both alive and well in each of us. You can feel both of them tugging at you most days of your life, but if Adam’s story is our story, then Jesus’ story is ours as well. We have both sets of genes in us. We are kin to both of them. And when the Adam in us is powerfully tempted to play God, the Jesus in us is more powerfully able to remain human, offering to keep us company on our own side of the line and showing us that the way to discover our Godlikeness is not to curse our humanity but to bless it, and to enter into it as fully as we dare--living a human-sized life this side of Eden, where the Lord who made us from the dust of the earth offers to breathe life into us again and again.”

We read in the scripture that the spirit led Jesus into the wilderness. It is an interesting thing to consider. The spirit didn't just lead Jesus into the wilderness to have a vacation or to get away from things. Matthew says the spirit led Jesus into the wilderness so that he might be tempted. In Mark's gospel, Mark says the spirit *drove* Jesus into the wilderness. What kind of spirit is this? What kind of God is this? In the church, we need to hear these words especially. When we think about new life, as we think about doing things for God in the church, there is a word of caution about breathing new life. New life means change. The spirit might lead us into the most unexpected of places. As the church, we need always be aware that the greatest temptation facing the church is the temptation to be popular, to say, to do those things that make us popular. That is not our calling or our mission as a church, to be popular.

The spirit led Jesus, and so the spirit leads us today. The spirit gives us strength to face all of the false gods we face. If you hear nothing else that I say this morning, I hope you hear this. Do you know why God does not want us to worship false gods? Have you ever considered that? In the Bible we read that God is a jealous God, but I don't believe that is why God does not want us to worship false gods. God does not want us to worship false gods because God knows that false gods do not satisfy.

There is a wonderful definition for the word "lust." Most of us think something about sex when we hear the word "lust," but it can be a lust for sex, a lust for power, a lust for money, or a lust for popularity. My favorite definition of the word "lust" is this: "Lust is the craving for salt by a man who is dying of thirst."

That's why God does not want us to worship false gods, because false gods not only don't satisfy; false gods destroy.

The spirit that led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted also leads us into this place this morning. Jesus said, "The Lord only shall you serve." So we come to worship in order to worship the one true God. Have you ever considered what some of the gifts of worship might be? The challenge of worship is for us to serve only one God, but the gifts of worship include the gift of community—we don't come here by ourselves, we take strength in worshipping with others. The gifts of worship include looking beyond ourselves. We are reminded that the world does not revolve around us. The gifts of worship also remind us that God is not only *with* us, but that God is *for* us. We do not face the struggles of life alone or on our own resources, but with God's help.

Some of you will remember the old Catholic bishop, Fulton J. Sheen. Listen to what Sheen said about Christ's sacrifice:

"Christ said, 'I refuse now to do a stunt to win them. It is when I am lifted on the Cross that I will draw men to Myself; it will be by My sacrifice and not by science that I will appeal; I will win followers not with test tubes, but with My blood; not with power, but with love; not with celestial fireworks but by the right use of reason and free will.'"

In other words, because Christ is human, Christ's example does matter. Christ's example matters because Christ was using the same cards that God has dealt to each of us. With our 21st century enlightened minds, I can imagine that

there might be at least one or two folks here who would struggle, just a little, with the concept of evil, especially some kind of a devil in a red suit with a pitch fork and a pointed tail. We trivialize evil when we say that is all that it is. Some of the events of this past week would certainly say something to us about evil. Some of the things that happen in war certainly communicate something to us about evil. We should never trivialize this. The problem is when we look for evil outside of ourselves.

There is in the book of Hebrews a wonderful scripture about the devil. We've never been quite sure what to do with this. You might not have heard of this scripture so I hope that you will listen carefully. "Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things so that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is the devil."

Do you hear what the writer of Hebrews is trying to say? We don't have to be afraid of death. We don't have to be afraid of any evil in life, because by his death Christ has destroyed death and evil. I can imagine this. On that darkest day in history, at the darkest moment when Christ was crucified, the devil was present. Some might suggest that he was dressed in a red suit with a pitchfork and a pointed tail. I think it is more likely that he was dressed as one who washed his hands of the entire affair, or maybe he was dressed as a Roman Centurion, or maybe he was dressed as a fisherman whose nickname was "The Rock." Or maybe he was dressed as a devious little fellow who was standing off to the side, counting pieces of silver. Or perhaps, more likely, he was dressed simply as one of the

disciples, one of Jesus' closest friends who stood by and did nothing to help. However he was dressed, when Jesus drew his last breath and said, "It is finished," we can imagine the devil's voice reverberating through the halls of hell. "Did you hear that? He's finished! He's finished! He's finished!" "I'm finished." Amen