

## “Two Voices”

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March 1, 2020

Isaiah 55:1-2a

Ho, everyone who thirsts,  
come to the waters;  
and you that have no money,  
come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk  
without money and without price.  
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,  
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Luke 4:1-2a

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.

### A Brief Chancel Drama for Lent

- Lay Reader: We often start Lent with the story of Jesus going into the desert for a few weeks. Before he starts his ministry, he fasts and prays and listens to God.
- Youngster: He fasts? What’s that?
- Lay Reader: It means he doesn’t eat.
- Youngster: For how long?
- Lay Reader: A few weeks.
- Youngster: Really? He must have been hunger then!
- Lay Reader: The Bible tells us that he was really hungry.
- Youngster: Why’d he do it then?
- Lay Reader: Well, before he started his preaching and teaching, he needed to spend some time getting close to God and making sure he understood how God wanted him to be.
- Youngster: I guess. (Thinking for a moment.) You said that a devil tempted Jesus. What’s that mean?
- Lay Reader: Some people think that a “real” devil came and teased Jesus and tried to get him to do things that God didn’t want him to do. Other people think it’s more that being so hungry, his mind (and his stomach) got him thinking about how much easier it would be to just eat and relax and not worry about doing things God’s way.
- That’s what we do sometimes, right?
- Youngster: I guess. Still, not eating for weeks – no wonder he was tempted!

Forty days of intentional alone-time with God. That's what Jesus did. And as Christ-followers that is our aim during the season of Lent. Do you fast? During the ecumenical Ash Wednesday service last week, Julie Gorenson reminded us that we're not talking about fasting from liver. She suggested, instead, fasting from Apathy. Or do you take up something new for Lent, like advocating for those without voice or serving the community meal this afternoon?

During Lent, we are invited to turn again to God. A relationship with God takes work, just like any serious relationship. We can get busy living our lives, so busy that we take God for granted. We can get swept up in the ways of the world around us. Lent invites to seek God, to answer God's call, to forsake the ways we have taken on that are not life-giving, and to return to God's way for us.

God seeks us, too. When we listen, we hear God as Spirit whispering, "I'm here. Let me protect you. Hear me answer. I'll deliver. Let me fill you."

The people to whom Isaiah was writing, in our first reading, were too eager to follow a different voice, too ready to compromise their Jewish identity and faith in order to get along in Babylon with its other gods and practices. We might remind ourselves that Isaiah's words could be applied to us in the U.S. today. We too could surrender our faith and the discipline of our baptism. We too could settle for a generic identity that's part patriotism, part consumerism, part privilege. None of us is immune. During Lent, we again hear God's call, reminding us that God's mercy comes with the expectation that we examine our identity through baptism and lead a life worthy of our calling.

God is always calling. That's one voice. But we also hear another voice that mocks and seduces people of faith. This voice promises ease and comfort. It suggests possibilities. It urges us to act against our faith and our identity. Lent is a time for learning how to listen to both voices and to judge between them. It's a time to hear better the true voice of God's assurance and to notice more quickly the seductive voice of unfaith. It's a time to practice distinguishing when even a good word can be used to serve unfaith.

Early Church leaders recognized that Christians live each day with both of these voices. How wise of them to set up the Church calendar so that we have these forty days to assess whether we have a faith that seeks understanding; to evaluate whether we accept the voices of political and economic power or honor the pain-filled voices of the marginalized; to gauge whether we live in true faith or practice cynicism or apathy.

During almost any commercial TV break, we are exposed to the myth that bigger is better. Faster is better. More is better. Children, and many adults, don't recognize this indoctrination. Why else would we work ourselves to exhaustion so that we can buy things we would not know we needed if someone else did not tell us so?

That poem in Isaiah, that I/Mike read from, is a wake-up call for all of us when we have been nearly talked out of faith by the voice of empire (even if we don't call it empire), when we have

wanted to push through with our own solutions instead of trusting in God's grace, when we have bought into the louder voices around us rather than heeding God's gentle call.

Lent invites us to ask ourselves questions. Questions like the ones Isaiah raises:

- What are we doing?
- Are we spending resources for that which is not bread?
- Do we wear ourselves out for that which does not satisfy?

Lent offers us gifts. Free gifts. Gifts of wine and milk. Of water and bread. Of all that we need. All that makes for the sacramental between God and us.

Lent is a summons. It is a call for us to bear new fruit. A call to do, and be, as we find when we pay attention to God's Good News. Our God has another way for our lives. And God wants to draw us out of the daily grind so that we can accept that less is actually better, that slower is good, and that multitasking leads, not toward but, away from abundant life.

During this first Sunday of Lent, as we recall again Jesus' time of temptation before he began his ministry, we are reminded that God calls us to forsake that other voice and to return to right relationship with God.

Christ knows about this other voice. Jesus faced the seductions of easy food, popularity and wealth. He knows how easy it could be for any of us to follow the ways of the world. He knows how easy it would be to live as if we are the monarch of our own lives. And because Jesus is fully human, when he turns his back on those temptations, he demonstrates that we can do likewise.

We can live as fully in God as Jesus does. And living in such close connection with God, we too can discover the ... is it strength or humility? ... to turn our backs when that other voice addresses us.

This is our Lenten calling. It's not about giving up chocolate or beer or liver. It is about turning again to God, letting God draw us ever closer and living from that holy place.

May it be so.