

Morning Meditation ~ January 11

*Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Luke 3:21-22*

What is the first image that flows into your imagination when you think of water?

Swimming in the ocean or splashing in a pool.

A drink of water after a morning walk.

Washing your hands...which we are all now experts.

Cooking or cleaning or running the water over grounds for the perfect cup of coffee.

We know that water is necessary of life – for all creation. Right now, my grass is not as vibrant green because we are not getting as much rain. Likewise, after working hard, I can feel worn down until that first gulp of water. Our lives are hydropowered. And Scripture is hydropowered. From Genesis 1 where God surfs and sings to the watery chaos to here where Jesus wades in the water for baptism to Revelation where there is a stream that waters two trees of life.

The story of Jesus' baptism is a reminder that in our baptism we are claimed as God's beloved and called to let our light shine. This is often where people will talk about "purpose" – finding your one true place and why you are here on earth. My response to that is...you have more than just one purpose. It isn't just about finding the one "thing" and doing that. Such a search for that one spark of your soul can be like finding a needle in a haystack. ***Rather, what if the purpose is to be fully alive in every moment?*** That is one of the messages in the recent movie, *Soul*, which I highly recommend. In that movie, one of the characters shares a great story:

"Excuse me," said an ocean fish. "You are older than I, so can you tell me where to find this thing they call the ocean?" "The ocean," said the older fish, "is the thing you are in now." "Oh, this? But this is water. What I'm seeking is the ocean," said the disappointed fish as he swam away to search elsewhere.

We are in the ocean. We are swimming and surrounded by the sacred. Like the young fish above, I don't notice it. If I see the beauty of a cloud...hear the rhythmic splashing sound of my pool...the birds singing...my dog brushing up against my leg for attention...this delicious cup of coffee. All that is in this one moment, to notice and enjoy and participate in the holy now of this present moment, that is one of the promises of being drenched in the grace of baptism.

**Prayer: Soak and saturate my soul, O God, to be awake to You every minute today.  
Amen.**

Morning Meditation ~ January 12

*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’” Luke 4:1-4*

Yesterday, we heard the holy moment of Jesus’ baptism. Drenched from his dip into the Jordan River, Jesus felt his soul come to life. Then? Then, he is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Wait. What? That is like saying the football team won the Superbowl, instead of going to Disney, they went to the dentist for a root canal. Feeling saturated and soaked by the sacred should make you soar; not make you sour. Jesus should have gone on Oprah or built up his branding on social media platforms. But right after a moment that changed his life with love, he experiences suffering.

There is a deep truth in this moment that reverberates in our own world.

You get that corner office you always wanted...and realize it takes away from family.  
You get that new computer...and realize that it really didn’t magically change your life.  
You fall in love...and then there is that fight over something you disagree about.

It isn’t either, or; Luke is telling us about the both/and of life.

I find it fascinating that the first temptation is around the most basic need – bread. Food. Something to sustain you and stop your stomach from grumbling grouchily. Our basic need beyond water is for calories to keep our bodies going. Parker Palmer contemporizes the temptations by saying this first one is to “be relevant”. We want to feel needed and necessary. We may dismiss someone saying, “Thank you,” with the reply, “It was nothing.” But inside our soul glows and glistens when someone notices us. Our ego likes to be notice and be able to meet another person’s need. To be relevant...to say or do something that matters...to meet people where they are. To be sure Jesus will end up meeting people where they are. He will end up feeding five thousand with bread and fish. He will end up offering a ritual of broken bread and a cup of wholeness. But, he will do this not as a magic trick to impress but to offer the bread of life to our souls.

It is my prayer for you today to be open to the One who claims you not for what you do but because of who you are. May God’s presence be felt every time you taste water and eat bread knowing God’s grace and love.

**Prayer: Open my eyes, O God, to You moving in my midst in beautifully ordinary ways. Amen.**

Morning Meditation ~ January 13

*<sup>5</sup> Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” <sup>8</sup> Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”* Luke 4:5-7

When I was a kid in the winter we would play, “King of the Hill.” The premise is simple. One person is on the top of the snow mound and all the others try to knock that person off so they can be the single one at the top. That game says a lot about our culture. As adults we play a version of that game. We notice who has the corner office. We notice the vacation pictures of others. We notice who got a new car or looks like they are a step ahead of us. Parker Palmer says of this temptation that Jesus is being offered “power, not with or for others, but always power over something or someone.” That kind of power is always hovering and hanging in the air we breathe calling out to us.

Pause...when have you found yourself trying to cling to the top of some hill for some prize?

In what ways does power, the ability to make something happen, cause you to act in less than healthy ways?

Here is a truth about power – it has health and unhealth – and a thin line between the two (or perhaps a tight rope). I know as a pastor I am afforded a certain power that comes in the form of words and sermons. I have moments...not my proudest...when those words have caused wounds and hurt and harm. This not only happened, but it also still happens. I have power as a parent. I have power when I drive my car. What other places do you sense that you have power? Can you think of moments when that power helped and times it caused harm? Both are true, which is why I think the gospels call this a, “temptation”.

I encourage and invite you today to reflect on moments when you made use of power over and when you felt powerless (for example – most of us feel this on the playground, in adolescents, in the early days of our career, waiting for the vaccine, and when we get older and are told we must move into a facility). Hold this alongside the one who knows what it is like to try to discern when and where and how to use power.

**Prayer: God of source and strength stir in my heart this day, guide my feet as I run this race, and let my words be in symphony with You. Amen.**

Morning Meditation ~ January 14

*<sup>9</sup> 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, <sup>10</sup> for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ <sup>11</sup> and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” <sup>12</sup> Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do*

*not put the Lord your God to the test.’’<sup>13</sup> When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time. Luke 4:9-13*

We all have that desire to be special, set apart or what Parker Palmer calls the temptation, “to be spectacular”. I will confess I keep ribbons I won for running in a race. Why? It isn’t like it was for winning the Boston marathon. They are in my bottom dresser drawer, but I can’t bring myself to throw them away. That ribbon is a tactile and tangible thing I can touch and remember I was recognized for finishing first in a local Turkey Trot one year. I could say the same thing about my diploma or the file I keep of certificates.

We live in this tension between realizing life is about more than me, but that I am here participating too. We want occasionally for the spotlight to shine on us and other times that light can be to blazing hot and blinds us. Or we can end up craving the light so much that we will do anything to get it. When our kids were toddlers, we had a parenting saying, “Negative attention is still attention.” That is sometimes our kids would act out just because they knew that could get a response. I am not sure we outgrow that especially in an age of polarization and social media that gives a platform for us to say things for the sake of getting “Likes” or “Retweets”.

To know that we are loved not because of our awards or framed documents, but because God’s love is unconditional and unceasing. Yet, our society doesn’t work that way. That is part of what all three temptations are about. The world works one way: get your bread while you can because there might not be enough; use your influence and power because someone else might knock you off the hill; and don’t share the spotlight because you should have it your way. (My thanks to Burger King for that slogan).

These temptations are as recent as our lives and the world we inhabit. To hold these close and carefully, because too often guilt is the first (and only) emotion around temptations. But what if, what we have explored this week, could be a truth that sets us free? Free to realize who and whose we are.

I pray today you will ponder prayerfully the ways this story of Jesus’ temptations is true in your story. And may we do so knowing that God isn’t judging us, but inviting us to be awake to the ways, like Jesus, we can feel trapped and tripped up by making our way in the world today.

**Prayer: God guide me and ground me with an honest and open heart on the ways I go astray each and every day. Amen.**

Morning Meditation ~ January 15

Today is the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. birthday. I encourage you to go YouTube and listen to a sermon he preached (there are several there). Or Google and re-read, “Letter from a

Birmingham Jail”. Dr. King’s words are powerful and as true today as when he first wrote/spoke them. I am so taken by his opening response in the Letter from a Birmingham Jail to people who were criticizing him and essentially telling him he was wrong. Dr. King didn’t respond by belittling others, calling names, or throwing verbal punches (as happens too frequently today). Dr. King sought to answer with words that are thoughtful and challenging. He writes, “Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. **Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.** We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial "outside agitator" idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds.”

What Dr. King is saying here ties to another one of his insightful quotes: *Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.* I think about this given the reflections on baptism and temptation this past week. I recently heard that when we take a stand make sure we do so on soil that can still be tilled and tended. That is, so often, we stand on ground that we don’t want to touch and won’t let anyone else near. But soil (both beneath us and within us) is alive. The soil within us needs to continually be nourished by water. We can poison the soil (within and around) with words and misuse of power. We can take soil that isn’t ours. We can demand that others see our soil, our position as the best.

It isn’t that we either take a stand or stay on the sidelines. There are moments we are fully engaged and moments of rest. There are moments we speak and times we refrain because we are not ready. And the problem is that we are quick to armchair quarterback other people’s lives and not see how we too have fumbles and unforced errors. Some may want to discount Dr. King. Some question his insistence on non-violence. Yet, for me, I hear his words and find God’s still speaking force moving in what he wrote decades later. I pray whatever sermon or speech you land on or read, God’s grace would move through you and help you tend/till the ground on which you stand.

**Prayer: God wake me up to Your grace; challenge me with Your unconditional love; and let me shine my light in whatever way and wherever I can. Amen.**