

Reflection: Luke 4: 1 - 13

Jesus was baptized by John. We remember that dramatic event. Then after all that, reality hits. The spirit that Jesus experienced led him out into the wilderness, a deserted place - a place that was rocky and arid with canyons, cliffs and caves. In this place Jesus fasted for 40 days. It was a time when he tried to figure out what his mission was as a Spirit filled person. If you fasted for even four or five days, you know the exhaustion, the hardship and also the exhilaration and clarity that fasting brings. The non-essentials and the garbage in our lives become evident. It was in this experience of wilderness fasting that Jesus had insights into his life's work. He, no doubt, got clarity about God's passion and dream for the world. It was here also that he encountered Satan.

The experts tell us that after an extended period of fasting, the body experiences changes which result in visions. Jesus encountered Satan in a series of visions which are typically called temptations. The temptations were serious efforts to deter Jesus from his vision. It was a good time to throw him off balance. The temptations made it clear that there was a serious clash between what Jesus experienced as God's dream for the world and the way of the world – the domination system. Jesus's vision was at odds with the accepted norms of behavior. It was an uncompromising break with business as usual.

Jesus's vision puts the Reign of God and the domination system at opposite ends of the spectrum.

- It does not align itself with the powers and the powerful.
- It cries out for social equity.
- It calls upon our true humanity.

This was seriously challenged by Satan. Satan was saying, "I will give you all this power and glory- if you worship me. You can share in this power." Jesus was clear that it was these values and powers that he needed to take on. Another world is possible. Forsake the old way. "I will not serve".

We are called again in this gospel to look at our lives through the lenses of Jesus's vision and the temptations.

I came face to face with the gaping wound of inequity and poverty many years ago when I first volunteered at Hope House. Just a quick glance at the surrounding neighborhood known as St. Thomas Project troubled me. Not far away, the richest people of the city lived. From my conversations and reflections, I learned that St. Thomas was no accident. I began to ask questions - Why were

these people so poor? Who makes the rules that govern their lives? Were the people here the ones that Jesus would have spent time with? I was dragged out of my hiding place, and I began to awaken from what Jon Sabrino would call “the sleep of inhumanity.” I began to see God from the point of view of the poor and the victimized and to see the world of the poor from God’s point of view.

Little did I know how much I had to learn about Scripture, Jesus’s vision and how to live life as a serious follower of Jesus as I did in the next 30+ years. It was here that I found joy and purpose. It was here that I saw how destructive power can be. The temptation is to look the other way, to be silent. To be faithful is to resist that temptation. The gospel makes it clear that Jesus was drawn to those some prefer not to see. Jesus’ perception of God’s character is compassion, and compassion can only be lived in justice and fairness. Satan said bow to the powers. Don’t rock the boat. Jesus said another world is possible.

We are part of the system that values power, money, possessions, privilege – values that keep us in bondage. We are driven by the fear that we don’t or won’t have enough. There’s nothing like fear that keep us in bondage- fear of losing friends, losing funds, losing favor with people in positions where decisions are made, fear of speaking out against the systems that oppress, fear that the cost will be too great. That’s not what Jesus’s vision was. Remember the story of the lilies of the field. It is shocking, delightful and liberating. It’s a great reversal of the way things are.

Jesus’ approach was consistent. When he invited people to join him, he did not invite the civic leaders, the church leaders, the lawyers - they were all caught up in the power that Jesus was trying to dismantle. He summoned working folk to join him. He performed acts that challenged the symbols of power. He spoke a counter wisdom that evoked the relentless criticism of the Chief Priests, the Pharisees, the Scribes - “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” “He heals on the Sabbath.”

And Satan said, “All this I give you if you bow down and worship.” Jesus said, ‘I will not serve’. Do we live out of a passion for the Reign of God or the domination system?

We choose God’s reign -

When we speak truth to power.

When we refuse to compromise when it benefits us at the expense of others.

When we refuse to participate in consumerism.

When we live simply.

When we resist the temptation to support war and militarism.

When we stand with the poor, oppressed and those who struggle.

When we refuse to accept stereotypes of people, whether they are gay, transgender, poor, of a different race.

When we insist on quality education for all children.

When we live in solidarity and allow others' pain to enter every fiber of our being.

When we speak out when it's not acceptable.

When we refuse to buy into an individualistic spirituality.

When we refuse to live the way of the world.

When we bow down in humility before God.

And when we feel afraid, outnumbered, weak, tired, like failures, beat up, tasered and pepper sprayed by City Hall, led away in handcuffs for speaking against nuclear weapons, vulnerable as you walk with someone to his last moments, screamed at for standing with the poor and oppressed - the angels will come and minister to us as they did Jesus. And it will feel good, it will feel very good. It gives me the goose bumps to think about it.