

Luke 4:1-11 The Human Story
March 6, 2022

The bible presents several stories, or images, that even in the “secular” world are well-known. Almost everyone seems to know about them:

Creation, heaven and earth, nature, people
Adam and Eve in the garden with the talking serpent
Noah and the Flood
Joseph and his Many-Colored Coat
The baby Moses in the basket on the Nile River
The Parting of the Red Sea . . . one could go on
Samson and Delilah
David and Goliath
Elijah on the mountain in the storm . . . Jezebel
Daniel in the Lion’s Den
Nebuchadnezzar’s Fiery Furnace
Jonah in the belly of the Great Fish

And the New Testament offers more:

The Nativity, with the shepherds and the magi
The Baptism in the Jordan River
The Sermon on the Mount - Beatitudes
The Feeding of the Multitude
The Changing of Water to Wine at Cana
The Stilling of the Storm
Walking on the Water

All the miraculous healings including:

The Paralytic lowered on his cot through the roof
The Man Born Blind at Siloam
The Raising of Lazarus

And the parables: among the most well-known
The Good Samaritan
The Prodigal Son
The Mustard Seed

And, of course, there are the stories associated Holy Week and the Passion:

The Triumphal Entry
The Cleansing of the Temple
The Last Supper
The heart-wrenching prayer in the garden
The trials - Pilate washing his hands
The Cross with the seven last words
The Empty Tomb

I am sure I have neglected to mention good stories. You have thought of some of the stories I have forgotten. It takes years of Sunday School classes and sermons to become familiar with them all. I haven’t even mentioned anything from the Acts of the Apostles or the Epistles. Yet most people have heard of at least some of these things.

What we are given, make no mistake, is not merely the story of Israel, or about Jesus even, and the history of early Christianity. It is the story of the human race, our own story. One of the reasons we remember them so well, and even people who never attend church know them, or many of them, is because we can enter into them, relate them to our own experiences. They interpret our lives for us, and help us understand its meaning, that it may be lived fully.

For better or worse, we live a life in a world that has some options; decisions to make about how to live. The situation is confusing but it seems to be as follows: that we are given a limited set of options and are forced to conclude that some are better than others.

As a matter of fact we may go so far as to say that there are some options that should be generally sought, and others entirely avoided. For example, to act honestly should be generally sought and to act in deceit should be avoided. In the middle there are some that carry moral force for the individual, but not generally. Vocational choices are not universal in the same way.

The situation is made more difficult by the universal human experience that one might desire something that shouldn't be sought, or fail to desire something that should. And in the more relative categories, one might choose selfishly, or with regard for others.

In other words, we are conflicted about what to do, how to live. There are temptations, tests. And now, on this first Sunday of Lent, we are given the gift and the task, the obligation of considering the temptations of Jesus, and his responses to them, after 40 days and nights out in the wilderness.

The question is, does any of this matter? The biblical answer is yes. This moral quality of life is a way of saying that life is meaningful, that what we think and do and say, matters. So let us look at them.

The choice is to seek one's own well-being at the cost of integrity. "You are hungry, turn these stones to bread." The choice is to seek power and wealth at the cost of idolatry, worshipping the created as if it is divine. "I will give you the kingdoms of the world, but you must bow to that which is not God." The choice is to put God to the test, "cast yourself down that the angels may come . . ." "There is more to life than food and pleasure. There is more to life than control and security. Life is not a magic trick, God is not a magician.

Not just as Christians, but as human beings, we are called to faithful living. Part of that faith is simply *that* our decisions and actions matter and we ought to seek the right and the good. The gospel news is that when we are challenged we find divine guidance, when we are weak we find divine help and strength, and when we fail, we find mercy.

Think of your life as a story, and enter into the biblical story, and stories. This journey through the wilderness of temptation; let it test you, let it judge you, let it shape your character. In the words of the 20th century theologian Karl Barth, "it is not an annihilation, it is an establishment." It is not a destruction, it is a construction. It will not destroy you, it will complete you, as it did Jesus; that life may be to the full.