

Our worship this morning begins with 14 verses from the gospel of Mark. In 14 verses Mark flies through John the Baptist proclaiming Prepare ye the way, Jesus is baptized (which recalls last week's transfiguration account), Jesus is driven into the wilderness for 40 days. He returns and proclaims the Kingdom is at hand. And then is calling disciples.....

I have been making the case that Mark's Jesus – is all about the Kingdom and how we live precisely pointing to Isaiah's call to live in right relation. Our exploration on this day will integrate Luke's "temptation narrative" into this case.

“It's what you take on”

ONE: Is not this the fast I chose; to loose the bonds of injustice

ALL: To share Your bread with the hungry?

ONE: to bring the homeless poor into Your house;

ALL: when You see the naked, to clothe them?

ONE: Then Your light shall break forth like the dawn,

ALL: and Your healing shall spring up quickly.

Isaiah 58:6-8

My suggestion is this, the historical model of Lenten devotion is misdirected. Lent is, for most of us, associated with the [phrase “what are you giving up for Lent?” Guided by the Isaiah passage from Ash Wednesday, and exploring the Lukan account of Jesus in the 40 days in the desert I think we clearly find that emphasis to be misdirected.

Because the “temptation narrative” (Luke 4:1-14) isn't about temptation! At least not what we think “temptation” is. We think of temptation as self indulgence or selfish pursuit. Of the three temptations – not one of them is about Jesus's wishes. The devil's suggestions are all temptations to the way God's purpose might be implemented.

The devil's questions are all about the implementation for the Kingdom. Should it be through bribery (offering bread) through power and authority, or through miracles and signs.

Our correct understanding of scriptures begins with our understanding of fasting. Fasting is not about giving up food. It is about the clarity of purpose which comes through removal from daily patterns (like eating) and the physiological clarity and cleansing which is a by product of not eating.

The 40 days in the wilderness are about Jesus removing himself from normal daily process (driven by the Spirit) in order to clarify his/god's purpose.

The devils questions are all about God purpose and what means should be used to fulfill the ends. What means should be used to fulfill the kingdom. Should Jesus bribe them with bread? Should he implement it through power, wealth and authority? Should he lure people with miracles and spectacles?

There is no question of self indulgence or selfish pursuit in sight. There is only the question of God's purpose and Jesus holding to that purpose. "God alone, should we serve"

For our part, I suggest the conclusion should be that Lent is not about what we give up, but about how we take on God's purpose. God's kingdom purposes of right relationship, compassion and justice.

May your Lenten journey be a time set aside (holy) to god's purpose and may it be a time to grow in the enactment of God's love.