

We have made our way through Epiphany to the first Sunday of Lent. On the journey we have encountered Angels, a star, Wisemen, Tyrants, a voice from Heaven and a Dove acting out of character, We have heard of a miracle, water turned to wine. We have also heard the beatitudes and contemplated their complicated blessings — and today, the first Sunday of Lent, — we read of an encounter between Jesus and the great tempter, the evil one, the Satan, the Devil.

Epiphany and Lent are dramatic seasons , and we do love drama. But today, I want us to consider that the star, the angels, the wisemen, the miracles, — — — are not the point. They are instead signs, billboards, pointing to the real news - God is among us! Emmanuel is with us! — on the barn floor, among shepherds, in the danger of tyrannical politics, in the mystery of religious experience, in the joy of human love and community at a wedding. God among us in the midst of the most ordinary and problematic of life's experiences, experiences we all know, and seek and celebrate. Blessed are you when you perceive that God is present there.

But now we need also to consider today's Gospel, the spiritual wrestling match between Jesus and the Tempter. We could view it from the stands or on TV! We could call it — "The dust up in the Desert! " We all know that wrestling matches are well scripted and that we will get to cheer the victor and boo as the loser retreats to the dressing room to prepare for a future match. How satisfying!

But, we can't watch from the stands. That's part of the delusion of the drama our culture loves. Even the dramatic temptation episode must be put in the frame of the birth in the stable and the strange blessings of the Beatitudes. We live and move and have our being, in the midst of a myriad of decisions, options, desires and fears; and always in the presence of the God whose deep commitment is to be among us through it all.

In today's gospel, Jesus and the tempter tussle over a number of issues expressed in extraordinary terms.

- Why not make bread from stones — to meet our own needs, or to make a tidy profit?
- The temptation to jump off the temple as a stunt to gain the adoring attention of the multitudes — they didn't have computers and on-line influencer options in those days so they had to make do with live events.
- Then the temptation of lust for world domination through power and manipulation. We see too much of that today to remain complacent or comfortable.

I want to talk more about the temptation to make bread from stones. That is, to have all our wants completely satisfied by the easiest means. And I will make these comments as they relate to the ministry

and work of our Eastern Synod's Climate Justice Committee. Last spring the committee, on your behalf, sponsored a "Pilgrimage for the Planet" We bicycled from Montreal to Parliament Hill in Ottawa to pressure the Canadian government to sign on to the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty. While we drew some attention, our hopes to have conversations with leaders were pre-empted by politicians leaving Parliament Hill to prepare for an election. So now, our effort is to encourage as many people as possible to, during Lent, call the Minister of Environment and express the urgent concern to dramatically reduce subsidizing the extraction and production of petroleum products. More information about how you can help to do that can be found on the Eastern Synod website.

Now this is of course a controversial ask. We can debate for a long time: effects on the economy, the rights of provinces to extract and sell resources, and our absolute dependence on oil. That dependency is where we all need to do some hard thinking.

Dependency is a condition of human life. We do need bread, We do need water. We do need the community of neighbours, We do depend on creation for these things. And Jesus said , "Your heavenly creator knows you need these things". So the issue is not our need. That is accepted.

The issue is how much? In what way? For what purpose? To meet basic need - or - to satisfy desire beyond need - To control our own security at the expense of others; the expense of the creation that so generously provides for our need?

In the face of need —should we dramatically make bread from stones? Hard to do !
Should we make bread, wealth, and convenience from oil? Maybe easier to do - but at what ultimate cost?

Sowers go out to sow, but not with a bag of wheat over their shoulders. Oil transports seed grains. Oil powers tractors that till soil, fertilize the fields, (the fertilizer is derived from fossil fuel) The tractor plants the seed, sprays the herbicides and pesticides. Oil drives the combines that harvest and the trucks that collect it . They move the wheat to granaries, and thence to other processors and from there to the grocery store. You and I drive there to bring it home -- or an Uber driver brings it to us. All on oil. And of course, this story is true of thousands of other products too.

And if that were not more than enough, I notice from my regular clean ups of our condo's recycling bins, that our daily bread of all sorts is wrapped in durable plastic of many kinds, which is then discarded, — and driven to recycling or landfill, in vehicles powered by oil. All of that oil ends up in the air we breathe - atmospheric carbon, CO2. Or, in our landfills where perhaps in another million years it will be oil again, or in our biosphere as micro plastic, the dangerous effects of which we are just beginning to understand.

We need bread, we are dependent on it. But to whom and what have we become beholden? Are our lifestyles still about real bread for legitimate need; or are they more about wealth through production for some, and bread for those who can still afford it? Gosh these are big sticky questions, and issues. We need some holy hope, courage, and vision to address them. This is where we need to take our eyes off the flashing lights and promises of wealth and glory -- and look back again at vulnerable humanity in the manger, in the midst of a rich but equally vulnerable creation.

One place I see some hope is in the recent Friends of Creation project around Lake Chad. Many congregations have been offering funds to support reforestation and sustainable agriculture in a region devastated by climate change. It's rather ironic that our relationship with fossil fuels played a large roll in the environmental decline of the Lake Chad area and that our Western Dollars sent there may have more healing impact there, than if they were spent here at home. Despite the expense we might like to avoid, we would do well to make similar investments in our own back yard. It would work on the problem at it's source and It would express our commitment to honour the relationship we have developed with the people of Chad.

That is one place to find hope - in the developing of relationship. We often say we do not live by bread alone. Maybe we live by many kinds and styles of bread. One of them being honouring honest, supportive, and sometimes challenging relationships with others both like and unlike ourselves.

Another nourishing bread could be understanding that our relationship with creation is **with** creation rather than **to** creation. We are not above, beside, or outside creation, but intimately woven into it, one with it. Doing harm to creation through notions and actions of mastery is doing harm to ourselves. Honouring creation is helping to make sure the bread of life creation offers, is available to nourish all our neighbours and all creation.

We share nourishing bread when we speak truth;

- the astounding truth of the miracle of creation that sustains us,
- the hard truths of the damages we and others do by manipulating creation for gain,
- the encouraging truth that we can embrace a deeper knowledge and understanding of creation that will lead to better paths of honouring the creation that honours our need by providing for us.

Every week we hear words that root us in God's provision of life through creation. Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it and shared it saying, "This is my very self, broken as bread for you.

And again he took a cup of wine saying: "This cup is my life poured out for you to sustain you in the, needs challenges, mistakes, and discoveries of life".

This is living bread, healing bread, sustaining bread. It is not bread that lasts forever in a plastic bag, but bread that lives by being shared and expended to honour life. This bread is for you and all our neighbours, the gift of creation for the life of the world. Take and eat, be nourished, cultivate it, share it, give it, for the sake of the world. Even the stones will cry out Hosanna .