

March 10, 2019
First Sunday In Lent
Giving Up Distractions : Temptations

Ancient Reading ~ Luke 4:1-13

Jesus returned from the Jordan filled the Holy Spirit, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. Jesus ate nothing at all during those days, at the end of which he was famished. The devil said to Jesus, "If you are truly God's Own, command this stone to turn into bread." Jesus answered, "Scripture has it, 'We don't live on bread alone.'"

Then the devil took Jesus up higher and showed him all the nations of the world in an instant. The devil said, "I'll give you all the power and the glory of these nations; the power has been given to me and I give it to whomever I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered, "Scripture has it, 'Worship the Most High God; God alone you will serve.'

Then the devil led Jesus to Jerusalem, set him upon the pinnacle of the Temple, saying, "If you are God's Own, throw yourself down from here, for scripture has it, 'God will tell the angels to take care of you; with their hands they will support you, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered, "It also says, 'Do not put God to the test.'"

When the devil had finished all this testing, Jesus was left alone. The devil awaited another opportunity.

**Contemporary Reading ~ *adapted from Francis Weller in
The Wild Edge of Sorrow: Rituals of Renewal and the Sacred Work of Grief***

Our strategies of anesthesia are astonishing. Entire industries have emerged to keep our senses dulled and distracted. Our need to be anesthetized is rooted in our smoldering dissatisfaction with the meager existence we have been offered by this society, which itself is a profound source of grief. We suffer from what the poet William Blake called "divine discontent." Our soul knows that we are designed for a bigger, more sensuous, and more imaginative life. But we can go for days, weeks, months, a lifetime... with only marginal encounters with beauty and the wild creation around us, and only rarely sharing an intimate moment with a friend, or taking the time to make a new friend. We are in collusion with the numbing as well, slipping into the void through alcohol, drugs, shopping, television, the internet, and work... distractions... anything to help us ward off the feelings of emptiness.

We were not meant to live shallow lives, pocked by meaningless routines and the secondary satisfactions of happy hour. We are the inheritors and heirs of an

amazing lineage, rippling with memories of life lived intimately with bison and gazelle, raven and the night sky, seasons and the stirrings of the earth. We are designed to encounter this life with amazement and wonder, not resignation and endurance. This is at the very heart of our grief and sorrow. The dream of full-throated living, woven into our very being, has often been forgotten and neglected, replaced by a societal fiction of productivity and material gain. It is no wonder we seek distractions. Every sorrow we carry extends from the absence of what we require to stay engaged in what Mary Oliver called, "this one wild and precious life." And every sorrow is made more difficult to metabolize by that absence.

Rituals of renewal and reflection can offer us a trail leading back to the vitality that is our birthright. When we no longer turn away but turn around (repent) to look within ourselves and shed distractions, our lives become more fully able to embody the wild joy that aches to leap from our hearts into the shimmering world beyond us.