

Renounce

3.5.17

Scripture Matthew 4.1-11 (Translation by Taylor Burton-Edwards)

Reader 1: Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He had fasted forty days and forty nights. After all that, he was hungry. The tempter said as he came toward him:

Reader 2: If you are the Son of God, just speak the word so these stones may become loaves of bread.

Reader 1: But replying, he said,

Congregation: It is written: A person lives not by bread alone, but from every word proceeding from the mouth of God.

Reader 1: Then the devil takes him into the holy city, and stood him on the peak of the temple, and says to him:

Reader 2: If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written, "He has given commands to his angels about you, and they will bear you up in their hands, lest you dash your foot against stone."

Congregation: Again, it is written, "You shall not test the Lord your God."

Reader 1: Again the devil takes him onto a very high mountain, and shows him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he says to him:

Reader 2: I will give all of these to you, if you'd but take the knee and worship me."

Reader 1: Then Jesus says to him:

Congregation: Get out of here, Satan. For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and to him alone shall you give your service."

Reader 1: Then the devil leaves him be, and behold, angels came and ministered to him.
Silence.

Renounce... Reject... Repent...

As baptized believers we vow to **Renounce** the Spiritual forces of wickedness. **Reject** the evil powers of this world. And **Repent** of our sin.

But WHAT does that mean?

Taylor Burton-Edwards, Discipleship Ministries staff - explains the Meaning of this Baptismal Vow. He suggests that:

The 'three active verbs: renounce, reject, and repent... are not synonyms. Each is its own concrete action, with its own set of implications for how Christians will live our lives.'

'To **renounce** is a fundamental act of treason. It is to break allegiance to a power or authority to which one had previously given allegiance and service.'

'To **reject** the evil powers of this world is a phrase that ... comes from the Latin word which means "to throw out"-- and ... is used ... to describe what Jesus does to demons (to cast out)." Edwards: "We ... pledge to do more than **not do** evil things. We pledge to throw out, to cast out, to shut the door behind any evil powers that seek to operate with

us or through us. So we not only break allegiances, we also commit not to allow evil any sway in our lives.

'To **repent** of our **sin** means more than feeling sorry or remorseful or guilty for bad things we.. have done.' It means "to turn from." (Hebrew). In addition, the pledge to repent is not simply to turn from "sins" but also from "sin" (*What's at Stake in Today's Baptismal Questions* - Taylor Burton-Edwards)

As the theologian Nietzsche writes: '...our actions pledging renunciation, rejection, and repentance... get us *started* ... on renouncing spiritual forces of wickedness, rejecting evil powers of the world, and repenting of sin. These vows ... mark the *beginning* of "a long obedience in the same direction" (Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Chapter 5: <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/n/nietzsche/friedrich/n67b/chapter5.html>)

In our scripture this morning, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the Wilderness to be tempted, tested by the Devil. Jesus "wrestled with His messianic ministry." (Augsburger)

Augsburger paints this picture: "Here in the wilderness area (between Jerusalem and the Jordan) Jesus walked alone with God. pondering and praying over His mission, and was attacked by the devil with the suggestion of alternate ways of achieving His goal. Satan's temptations were self-serving approaches to the ambitions of life..." (Communicator's Commentary, Matthew, © 1982 Word, Inc; Myron Augsburger, NT Vol 1; ch. 1 "The Person of the King;" pp. 21 -58)

"The temptation was ... to use this privilege (Son of God) for His own self-interests." Devil came with "Three different angles" -

- 1) *Turn stones to bread* - use power selfishly; meet humanity's material needs
- 2) *Jump off Pinnacle of Temple* - be a wonder-worker - attract people to follow Him.
- 3) *Worship the Devil* - Follow alternate route to accomplish goal - trust the devil not God (Communicator's Commentary, Matthew, © 1982 Word, Inc; Myron Augsburger, NT Vol 1; ch. 1 "The Person of the King"; pp. 21 -58)

How Jesus responded: RENOUNCED AND REJECTED.

In his book, ***The Word before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching***, Charles Campbell portrays Jesus as a person whose entire ministry is about renouncing the spiritual forces of wickedness, rejecting the evil powers of this world, and repenting of our sinful behavior, both individual and corporate. Campbell interprets the story of the temptations in the wilderness in a new light. He "paints the temptation story as the opening act of Jesus' mission, Whose ministry will be to resist the powers and principalities of the present world. it is ultimately a ministry that will lead to crucifixion at the hands of these very same powers and principalities." (Charles Campbell, *The Word before the Powers: And Ethic of Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002., 44-48).

"Jesus' response to the temptations presented by the Devil is clear and consistent. He says no. He resists by faithfully and steadfastly refusing to participate in the worldly

system that allows some to dominate at the expense of others.” (Charles Campbell, *The Word before the Powers: And Ethic of Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002., 44-48).

“The first temptation that Jesus refuses is to use his power to preserve himself. (Campbell, 46).

“In the second temptation, the Devil tries to use Scripture itself, demonstrating that the Word of God can be used by the powers of this world in ways that are in direct opposition to the way of God.”

And again Jesus remains resolute in his refusal to (give in) to the ways of the world. He will not test God, nor will he use God for his own gain. Once again taking up Scripture as his primary tool of resistance, he reminds his tempter of what is written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’

“The final temptation Jesus faces is to use his power to become a king, to willingly use violence to put himself at the top of the worldly Domination System.”

“All of the kingdoms can be yours,” the devil tells Jesus, “[if you will just bow down to me and my ways], if you will just lord your power over others and take up the sword of the nations.” (Campbell, 46).

“Again Jesus says no, wielding the sword of Scripture against his enemy: ‘For it is written, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”’

“And with that, Jesus orders Satan ‘away.’ The power of the Domination System is avoided, at least for the moment.” (Charles Campbell, *The Word before the Powers: And Ethic of Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002., 44-48).

During the past two months, we focused on inviting people into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ —

During the season of Lent, (the next five weeks), we will explore what it means to make a commitment to join in the work of Christ in the world through baptism into the community of faith. (Dr. Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

“Lent is traditionally a season set aside for preparing people to take the next step in the journey toward discipleship by being baptized into the body of Christ, the church. In United Methodism, baptism is not an act by an individual. Baptism is an act of the community of Christ. It is a covenant between an individual, Christ, and a community of faith, to live together as disciples and to give our whole lives over to being incorporated into the body of Christ. The focus is on the *corporate* nature of the ritual. In baptism, we make a commitment to hold one another accountable as disciples of Jesus Christ and to confess our sins, not just as individuals, but as human beings forging a life together, bound eternally by the Spirit of Christ.” (Dr. Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

Baptism is both individual and communal. (Dr. Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

So as we begin our journey (toward the baptismal font) today, let us be reminded first and foremost that when we make our initial vow in front of the body of Christ when we are presented for Holy Baptism, to “renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin,” (*The Services of the Baptismal Covenant of The United Methodist Church as Revised to Align with the 2008 Book of Discipline and Book of Resolutions*, Copyright © 2009, The United Methodist Publishing House. Published by The General Board of Discipleship with permission from The United Methodist Publishing House.) *we are not just renouncing the spiritual forces that **we struggle with as individuals**. We are also rejecting the evil powers that are loose in the world. Likewise, we are not just repenting of our sins as individuals. We are also repenting of the sins of humankind as a whole.* (Dr. Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

RENOUNCE. REJECT. REPENT.

So the church takes this time every year to remind ourselves that we need to join Jesus in the resistance by fasting, and by meditating on God’s Word, and by holding one another accountable in Christian love and witness. We can’t skip over this step. We have to be with him and with one another in this journey toward what it means to be in a shared life together as the body of Christ. (Dr. Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

The good news in this story is that the power of God in Christ is stronger than the power of Satan. The power of good always triumphs over the power of evil, and the power of life—of resurrection—trumps the power of death and destruction every time. There is hope for our future despite the spiritual forces of wickedness and evil powers of this world that we must fight against. (Dr. Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

As we move through this season, let us recommit ourselves to joining with Jesus in living out God’s mission to fight against the powers and principalities that would seek to destroy not just us, but this world and everything in it. (Dr. Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

May God help us to **Renounce** the Spiritual forces of wickedness. **Reject** the evil powers of this world. And **Repent** of our sin. Amen.