

Year C, Lent 1 2/17/13
Hope Central Church
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"All Who Wander"

Luke 4:1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

He knew he made a mistake; it was, literally, all over his little 3-year-old face.

"John, what did you eat?" "Nothing." "Are you sure?" "Yeah." "Look at Mommy. Did you eat a snack?" "No." "You know it's wrong to tell a fib, to lie to Mommy?" "Yeah."

"So, what did you eat?" "Nothing." The camera pans from the sprinkles still attached to little John's face up to the counter, where the canister of red-and-white sprinkles is still open and half eaten. John couldn't resist eating those sprinkles any more than his mom could resist capturing the adorable fib on video and then sharing it on youtube. "John, why are the sprinkles gone?" "They're not allllllll gone...."

Perhaps you saw John and his mom on the Ellen show recently. Kids know something about right and wrong, about giving in to temptation, don't they? We learn at an early age that coloring outside of the lines means you're careless, that making mistakes on a test means lots of red ink that all your classmates can see (and that papers with no mistakes get smiley faces). So we perfect, push ourselves to achieve, because "getting something wrong means there's something wrong with us." We take on social messages of rightness and wrongness. In addition to getting Kathryn Schulz's book, *Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error*, I watched her TED Talk this week. She spoke about the experience of being right and being wrong and says that being wrong feels like being right...until we realize we're wrong. Wile E. Coyote in the Looney Tunes cartoons chases Roadrunner off the cliff: he runs and runs, even in thin air...and when he looks down, that's when he plummets. Long before Descartes said, "I think, therefore I am," St. Augustine said, "I err, therefore I am." It is human nature, we all know, to be fallible, to make mistakes. In the abstract, everyone messes up. In the particular, I am never wrong.

The feeling of realizing we are wrong is painful; it can shake us to our very core. Schulz compares it to being exiled: "from our community, from our God, even--and perhaps most painfully--from our own best-known self." Jesus, upon being declared the Beloved at his baptism, needed some time away to reflect on his identity, to connect with his best known self. He followed the Spirit's leading into the wilderness, where he could come to terms with what had just happened, with what it could mean to be God's Beloved One.

It was during his wandering in the wilderness that Jesus faced the temptation, that urge to use his newly proclaimed status to his own ends. He was offered an opportunity to trade on his Belovedness, to manipulate his situation to live into social expectations of power, prestige, creature comforts. Jesus understood what we still understand: there's a social system in which we live, with standards of power and privilege toward which we are all tempted or against which we must rail to claim our dignity and worth.

I wonder what the story would have been had Jesus not given the right answers. Unlike a toddler, who couldn't resist the beautiful red and white sprinkles, we cheer for a Christ who can resist, who can say no to far greater temptations than alluring, sugary treats. It's certainly gratifying that Jesus said, "No," to the worldly pleasures that so tempted him. It's hard enough to give up chocolate, or Facebook, but the idea of turning down a lifetime of power, wealth, and comfort.... Would the story be as powerful, as important, or even recorded if he'd given in? It could be that Jesus' temptation was important for his future irrespective of the rightness of his responses or his ability to overcome temptation. Looking at this story with the belief that there's more to life than right and wrong, what I see is a person who calls on his tradition to keep him grounded, a person who understands the way of the world and yet chooses to believe that there is something deeper from which to draw.

In her TED Talk, Schulz said, "The miracle of your mind isn't that you can see the world as it is; it's that you can see the world as it isn't. We can think about the past, and we can imagine the future." I think this is part of the beauty of what changed for Jesus

in the wilderness. Jesus gained clarity about what could be by seeing the social standards at play and using his tradition to circumvent them. Jesus understood society, the norms into which he could live, anonymously and perhaps even comfortably, and maybe during his temptation, he began to realize that there were other ways of being. His response to each temptation came directly from his tradition, words he'd studied since he was young. He had a keen understanding of the tradition in which he stood, tradition that rooted his identity and his work. Because he could imagine the past, he could also envision a future. Fully understanding the system and the temptations it offers, Jesus' ministry became all about living outside the framework, living in ways contrary to those standards despite all the people criticizing his methods as "wrong." Facing the temptations, perhaps, changed his life.

Schulz told her TED audience that the beauty of being wrong is the ability to be astonished. "We [thought/expected] one thing," she said, "and something else happened instead. We generate incredible stories about the world around us, and then the universe astonishes us." Jesus, filled with the Spirit, went into the wilderness. I imagine him wanting a spiritual retreat, a time of sweet communion with God. What he got was something different altogether: confronting his most base desires, the things that could inhibit his ministry. And yet, upon his return from the wilderness, the clarity and creativity with which he lived and worked was incredible. The universe no doubt astonished him, and his response was to see himself in the line of his tradition, as part of a story, to see the social opportunities that were available to him, and to imagine a new way of living. Beyond the rightness and wrongness was a world of possibility, of

creativity, of connection. Beyond privilege, power, and the expectation of our rightness or wrongness is the potential for liberation and beloved community.

Lent is a journey--into the wilderness and back again, searching for God. We are considering rightness and wrongness this season not for the sake of embarrassment or shame about the times we are wrong or have been told we are wrong. We are exploring these ideas because beyond the social expectations of right and wrong, there is the possibility of astonishment and creativity. We are following the example of Jesus, who wandered in the desert as others did before him, led by the Spirit, seeking his best self. We know what Jesus knew, that the world expects us to be right or wrong, to label, to judge, to pigeonhole. Everywhere we look, we see our culture trying to convince us that we ought to adhere to standards of wealth, privilege, beauty, intelligence--and that if we do not meet the standard, by birth, by chance, or by choice, we are "wrong." And yet, our hope and our goal is not to adhere to arbitrary standards of rightness or perfection.

We are on a journey to see God, as we have been discussing in recent weeks. This journey requires us to be attuned to the spiritual life through community, service, prayer, tradition and Scripture. The journey frees us to call on our faith, on our tradition, to envision a different standard and to live into it, just as Jesus did. For us, this Lent, exploring issues of wrongness and rightness is a part of the process of spiritual growth. This process will lead us to ultimate goodness and truth that is creative, justice making, love sharing. Rumi said, "Beyond wrongdoing and rightdoing is a field. Join me there." That is where we are journeying together, through the wilderness of right and wrong to a fertile field of creativity that lies beyond. Schulz says in her book, "To err

is to wander, and wandering is the way we discover the world; and, lost in thought, it is also the way we discover ourselves." We are on this journey, tempted toward perfection but open to creativity. The journey of Lent is the continuation of an age-old story, aligned with tradition but open to new ways of being. May we find for ourselves the field beyond wrongdoing and rightdoing of which Rumi spoke. May we find the Sacred there, and may we be astonished. Amen.