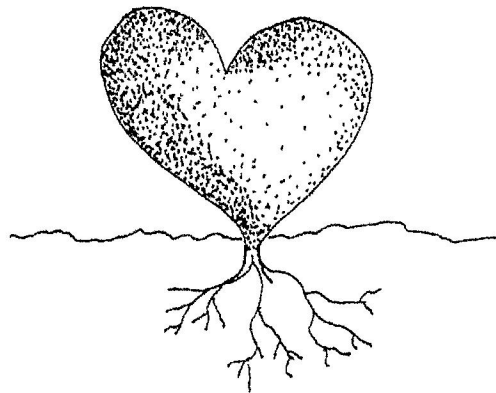


Luke 4:1-13

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.



**STAY ROOTED IN LOVE**

"Feasting on Heart Healthy Words"

### 'Tell Me The Story of Jesus'

Tell me the stories of Jesus, write on my heart every word;  
Tell me the story most precious, sweetest that ever was heard.  
(refrain)

Fasting alone in the desert, tell of the days that are past,  
How for our sins He was tempted, yet was triumphant at last . . .  
(vs.2a)

In a recent Late Night Show interview with author George Saunders, Steven Colbert asked "Is there a difference when you write for children rather than for adults?" "Yes," replied the award winning *Macarthur Genius Fellow*. "Rather than being cautionary, like adult stories, my children stories are a radical defense of tenderness." Without pause he went on to describe the cultural wilderness in which our children now live. "I see that our world has swung to the materialistic, rational, analytical, fact based, share holder side. I think that our children are in danger of not coloring in the real, powerful gifts of love, tenderness, and patience (the ones that we grew up with) into their lives. So, I tell stories in which the world sometimes does go bad, but when it does, we have spiritual resources to help us out. My stories have a happy, not disastrous ending. Nobody dies and there's not a lot of crushing of enemies. When a little girl has a problem she can win by solving it . . .and, she can also take a look back at her enemies and redeem them." So Stephen asked him: "In your book, there's a part where the character 'Capable' says that it is no fun being the sort of person who eats in a warm house while others are shivering outside." Nodding, George replied: "I see my stories as a kind of training ground for empathy. Other stories might end with Capable saying, 'It's too bad that others are cold, but do nothing about it. Mine end on a happy note with the child finding a tender way of bringing the shivering in and including them in her warm circle of love.

According to the gospel writer Luke, the Holy Spirit's training ground for empathy for Jesus was the vulnerable, famished state which he was suffering during his forty-day long fast. So the first step in his training was to learn how to say, 'no.' 'No' to

his ego's compelling desire to serve only his own needs; 'no' to asserting authority and power over others for its own sake; 'no' to the idolatry of worshipping the god of safety and security. In his Lenten reflection, 'Temptation to Cheat,' Jason Byassee (professor, Vancouver School of Theology, British Columbia) wrote: 'It is charming that St. Valentine's Day and the first Sunday of Lent are simultaneous. Go ahead and nosh on the chocolate: Every Sunday is a little Easter, fit for feasting. Not that Jesus will indulge with you today. He's famished---having fasted 40 days. Don't pass over this too quickly. Jesus is entirely human, and he's as hungry as we would be if we were to fast so long. The tempter offers good things: bread, power, protection from death. He even uses scripture to promote his suggestions. He offers things that Jesus uses elsewhere: Jesus is the bread of life, and makes more bread when there is not enough. Jesus, contrary to the tempter's claim (Luke 4:6), is the unacknowledged Lord of everything. Jesus plans to conquer the grave not by avoiding it but rather by suffering it himself.' This might be a good Sunday to think of the ways we are tempted by food, power, and schemes to cheat death. While many in the world starve, in the Western and Northern hemispheres we die from the diseases of excess. We have more power than any people ever and less wisdom about how to use it. And our health-care industry is very good at cheating death---good enough that we trust it to do what only God can do: save us. Jesus' response to unending food, power, and safety is, simply, 'no.'" We might say with him: No, I won't acquire my livelihood illicitly. No, I won't grab for power in order to dominate and subjugate others. No, I won't try to use religion to avoid such basic human realities as aging and death. (Sojourners, Feb. 2016)

Saying a Lenten 'no' with Jesus infuses our spiritual life with empathy, compassion, and care. In our corporate worship of God it's our time of reconciliation in which we confess our common sin and sing: **Create in me a clean heart O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence, O Lord, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and renew a right spirit within me.**

Little by little each Sunday, our souls feel a little heavier with empathy, our spirits are enlivened by the Spirit of Compassion, and our hands are moved to give care.

'The desert,' noted John Stendahl, 'is not God-forsaken nor does it belong to the devil. It is God's home. The Holy Spirit is there, within us and beside us.' For Jesus, the same Spirit that led him into the wilderness brought to his mind scriptures from Deuteronomy for the correction of the devil's seductive interpretations. These scriptures tethered him in the heart of God, securing his holy relationship as 'Son of God.'

Do not put the Lord your God to the test! (6:16)

One shall not live by bread alone! (8:13)

You shall worship the Lord your God and serve only God! (10:13)

These scriptures put Jesus in right relationship with God. But what of the happy spiritual gifts of Love, tenderness, and patience? Henri Nouwen wrote: "Success, popularity, and power can indeed present a great temptation, but their seductive quality often comes from the way they are part of the much larger temptation to self-rejection. When we have come to believe in the voices that call us worthless and unlovable, then success, popularity, and power are easily perceived as attractive solutions . . . Self-rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life because it contradicts the sacred voice that calls us the 'Beloved.' Being the Beloved constitutes the core truth of our existence." What do you think? When Jesus' world went bad, did faith in the words that he heard when he came up from the waters of baptism, "You are my Son whom I Love, with you I am well pleased" tether Jesus happily in the heart of God?"

Prayer. We give thanks, O God of sacred stories, for the witness of Holy Scriptures. Through it, you nurture our imaginations, touch our feelings, increase our awareness, and challenge our assumptions. Bless we pray, our hearing of your word this day. Speak to each of us; speak to all of us; and grant that by the power of your Spirit, we may be hearers and doers of your word. Amen.