

Weapons of the Spirit  
Ephesians 6:10-18; Luke 4:1-13  
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*How can one close one's eyes at the fact that the demons themselves have taken over the rule of the world, that it is the powers of darkness who have here made an awful conspiracy.*

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

On the day after France surrendered to Nazi Germany during World War II, Andre Trocme, the pastor of a small church in the small village of Le Chambon in southern France, stepped into the pulpit and proclaimed: "The responsibility of Christians is to resist the violence that will be brought to bear on their consciences through the weapons of the spirit" (film *Weapons of the Spirit*).

Over the next four years this small church and this small village provided sanctuary for over five thousand Jews, saving them from the Nazi death camps. Never once did they fire a shot. Never once using violence, instead they fought evil and darkness with the weapons of the Spirit that the Apostle Paul tells us about in Ephesians 6: truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, Scripture – the Word of God – and prayer. Lots and lots of prayer, while they hid Jews from the Nazis, smuggled them to Switzerland, forged documents, fed them, sheltered them, and clothed them. They never once lost a refugee and never once used violence or evil means to try to defeat evil.

Jesus goes straight from the waters of his baptism into the wilderness with nothing more than weapons of the spirit. At baptism, Jesus is affirmed that he is called as God's anointed, the Messiah. But what kind of messiah is he going to be? It is in the wilderness, the desert, where everything is stripped away, where there are beasts and demons and the unknown, a place of chaos and confusion, indeed one of the names for the devil is the Confuser. This is where Jesus must hammer out who he is, what he is going to do, and what his Way is going to be like.

Into the wilderness, Jesus goes head-to-head, with the devil, with nothing more than the weapons of the spirit. Forty days of battle against the Prince of Darkness grim. Flannery O'Connor referred to the devil, "not as some generalized evil, but an evil intelligence" determined to defeat the purposes of God (Habit of Being, letter Nov. 20, 1959). New Testament scholar Walter Wink called Satan "the spirit of the systems of domination."

It is important that we understand the world of the New Testament and what it is trying to say to us: this story of salvation, redemption, and the New Creation of God is about God and us, but it is also about a third power, variously referred to as the Enemy, Evil, Satan, the Devil, the demonic, Lucifer, the great Antagonist, or the Confuser. The Apostle Paul does not use the name Satan but instead speaks of the Principalities and Powers, and the New Testament speaks of authorities, dominions, world rulers, thrones, angels, elemental spirits, princes of the air, strongholds, serpent, dragon, lion, beast, and Beelzebub. These are the spirit of systems of domination. Systems have a spiritual aspect to them just like an individual person does. And Paul assumes that these systems, though originally created by God for good and order and peace in this world, have rebelled against God, and seek their own enhancement and domination of everything and everyone

else. Paul speaks of Sin and Death, which are contrary to God, and to which we are enslaved.

Growing up in a White middle-class home in a small-town West Texas, I thought Sin and Death was mostly about drinking, drugs, and sex. Then, as a high school student, I visited Dachau, near Munich, one of the Nazis' largest death camps. Though I was fairly well read for a teenager in history and World War II and the Holocaust, I was not prepared for such a place. How could I have been? It was a place where the intent was deliberately, purposefully, and systematically to eliminate goodness. Not only extermination but the thorough and radical negation of the humanity of thousands of people. I remember clearly that I was unable to speak the rest of the day after visiting Dachau. I was in shock. For the first time, in my 17-year-old White middle-class American life, I caught a glimpse of true evil, true Sin and Death.

Later, that year in high school, I read Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, where the narrator is going up the river in search of the mysterious Mr. Kurtz. As the riverboat penetrates ever deeper into the interior, the narrator describes his sense of evil as "the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention. *It looked at you with a vengeful aspect*" (emphasis mine). When I read that, I remember thinking of Dachau.

Dachau, Auschwitz, Treblinka, or genocide in Bosnia or Rwanda, destruction of the planet, gun addiction, hate-filled racism, Putin's invasion of Ukraine – this worldwide, cosmic scope and malignant power of evil, both on an individual level and on a systemic or corporate level, calls us to speak of a power far more monstrous than the mere sum of individual people doing bad things.

There is much more going on here. There is an inscrutable intention of Domination and Darkness and Death.

Let us not be naïve. We can call it myth but do not underestimate what we're up against. You can call it what you want but the Bible gives it the name Satan, the devil, the great Antagonist, the Evil One, the spirit of the Powers of Death and Darkness and Domination.

Luke tells us that Jesus came up out of the waters of baptism and walked straight into the heart of darkness. He invaded the Empire of Death.

Jesus fasts for forty days, an ancient practice focusing all of oneself in God. In Jesus' fast, the Evil One comes and tempts him to turn the rocks and stone into bread. Jesus says, "No," and then adds, "One does not live by bread alone." Matthew's version of this same story adds, "but by every word that comes from the mouth of God," quoting Deut. 8:3. Jesus is practicing the very thing the Scripture talks about: immersing himself so much in the Word of the Living God, that everything else is secondary.

Then the devil takes him up to where Jesus can glimpse all the kingdoms and nations and political powers of the world and says, "I'll give you all the power and authority over all these, if you'll bow down and worship me." Once more Jesus responds with Scripture, "The Bible says worship the Lord your God, and serve only him" – Deut. 6:3.

Finally, the devil takes Jesus up to the pinnacle of the Temple in Jerusalem and said, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down." Then the devil quotes

the Bible himself from the Psalms, “He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you.” And then another verse, “On their hands they will bear you up so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.”

Jesus replies again from Deut. 6 (v.16), “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” Then Luke says that the devil departed from him until an opportune time.

Before we get into why these three temptations. I want us to get an idea of what we’re up against when we serve the goodness and the Light of God and oppose the Darkness. Remember that Darkness is contagious. When we grapple with it, especially if we think we can defeat it using its own weapons, then we are infected by it and over time, we become just like that which we oppose.

Frederick Nietzsche said, “Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster.” Or Carl Jung, “You always become the thing you fight the most” (both quoted in Wink, *The Powers that Be*, p. 125).

Theologian Miroslav Volf, whom we are reading in our Lenten small groups, wrote in an earlier book about the genocide in Bosnia, the former Yugoslavia, during the 1990’s, where he grew up. He wrote:

*Once the conflict started, it seemed to trigger an uncontrollable chain reaction. These were decent people, helpful neighbors. They did not, strictly speaking choose to plunder and burn, rape, and torture – or secretly enjoy these. A dormant beast in them was awakened from its uneasy slumber.*

*And not only in them. The motives of those who set to fight against the brutal aggressors were self-defense and justice, but the beast in others enraged the beast in them. And so the moral barriers holding it in check were broken and the beast went after revenge. In resisting evil, people were trapped by it... Evil engenders evil (Exclusion and Embrace, p. 82).*

Evil is contagious. It infects all who grapple with it. The Darkness outside of us somehow or another connects with the Darkness inside of us and contaminates everything and everyone in contact. New Testament scholar Walter Wink writes that back in 1982, he and his wife June, with others, spent about four months in South and Central America observing military dictatorships, talking with the tortured, visiting slums, working with people whose loved ones had “disappeared.” He says he began to slip into spiritual darkness without knowing what was happening. He became weak and physically emaciated and came back to the U.S. for rest and medical care. Over time he realized he was spiritually wasted. He had no strength, could not get out of bed, and gave into despair. The stories and scenes of torture and detention had, unknown to himself, seeped into his own depths and activated old, deep wounds in his own life (*The Powers that Be*, p. 124-125).

Back to the Jesus story. I’m just speculating, but what if the temptation of bread was not just about feeding his immediate hunger but also brought up old traumas of when Jesus was a toddler and Mary and Joseph snatched him up in the middle of the night heading out the back door of their house in Bethlehem while the front door was kicked in by Herod’s soldiers looking for him? What if there were deep memories, family memories of being hungry on the road to Egypt along with other refugees, fleeing the murderous Herod?

When the devil tempted Jesus with political power and Jesus remembered – consciously or unconsciously – growing up in Nazareth, and hearing the stories of Sepphoris, located only four miles away (about as far as it is from here to downtown). About the time of Jesus’ birth, Sepphoris rebelled against Rome. In response, Rome destroyed the town, burned everything to the ground, and took all 2,000 residents out on the road and crucified them. All – everyone – every man, woman, and child, were left on crosses along the road until their bodies rotted and their bones were picked clean by vultures. Rome then came in and rebuilt the town from top to bottom and imported people loyal to Rome to live there. It is likely that Joseph, Jesus’ father, was employed as a carpenter in the construction of the town.

So, what if the temptation was not simply about some sort of abstract political power, but the power to get those who had done such a thing some thirty years before to people that Joseph and Mary likely knew? The motive would have been somewhat like Miroslav Volf said earlier, justice and vengeance and setting things right. Jesus would have been justified in using violence and coercive power to get those evil Romans.

And what if the temptation to jump from the top of the Temple had to do with getting the attention of power-grabbing clergy and corrupt religion. With one fell swoop, perhaps Jesus could have convinced the religious authorities of his own authority.

Here’s the thing. Jesus was not infected by the contagion of Darkness because he did not use the weapons of Darkness. He used the weapons of the Spirit. He was immersed in the written word of God, the Scriptures. He fasted and prayed and immersed his life in the Living God – every day. He spoke the truth

and knew the truth, trusted God completely, and because he had said “yes” to God in baptism, he now better knew how to say “no” to Darkness.

Most of us have not and likely will not face such Evil and Darkness as Dachau, Bosnia, or even Central America. But after two years of isolation, disconnection, and fragmentation from a global pandemic, inundated and surrounded by hate and fear, and now, this Russian invasion, it is easy for the Darkness “out there” to infect us and hook into the Darkness inside of us, and show up as depression and despair, anger, fear, and all sorts of confused and chaotic lives. Darkness is brought to bear on our consciences and hearts and souls.

For like Andre Trocme said the violence and darkness will be brought to bear on our consciences, our spirits, as well as our bodies, and our world.

So, we pray for one another. We must frequently be together, praying, singing, as well as drinking coffee, visiting, and now – we’re moving to where we can eat together! Immerse ourselves in Scripture, do not neglect gathering together in worship of the Living Christ. Listen to one another, forgive one another, and receive forgiveness from one another. Learn to put aside all we do and think that hooks into the Shadow and let all we do be in the Light of Christ, through the Light of Christ, and with the Light of Christ. The same Jesus who withstood the devil, will give us the strength to withstand the Darkness today.

One other thing: Just know that even though Darkness is contagious. So is the Living Light of Christ. It spreads.



In early 1943, Andre Trocme, along with his assistant pastor, as well as a teacher from the nearby school, were arrested by the Vichy police. (Their detention only lasted 5 months, but no one knew that at this point. As far as they knew, this was the beginning of the end of their lives.) Word spread quickly throughout the village of the arrests. The Trocmes invited the two policemen to sit down to dinner with them even though they were arresting Andre. After the meal, with their suitcases packed, the three men, along with the two policemen, stepped out to walk to the town square where a police car awaited them. When they stepped out, the entire street was lined with the people of Le Chambon. As they walked through the snow, the bystanders began to sing “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” (*Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*, p. 22-24). Remember the 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza:

*And though this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us  
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us  
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him  
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure  
One little word shall fell him.*

What is that one little word? It is the Living Word – Christ.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One True God,  
Mother of us all. Amen.