

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7

Matthew 4:1-11

Romans 5:12-19

“Be glad, rejoice in the Lord;
shout for joy, you who are pure of heart.” AMEN!

We behold two figures in the desert.

They stand head to head in a cosmic duel.

Whenever I am reminded of this
confrontation between Jesus and the Tempter,

I almost always recall the devil’s craftiness and
then Jesus’ calm response to his
“crafty” temptations.

Where I fight, Jesus calmly reasons,
where I run He remains. (Pause)

We also think of the three things
the devil used to tempt Jesus:
food, protection, power and

equate them with our own lives and
our own temptations.

And there is some benefit for us to do this, I suppose.

I mean, when we are faced
with the daily temptations...

it makes sense for us to have scripture
in mind to counter (or rebuke) the food,
the promised protection,
the lure of power.

But, we are not the same as Jesus,
faced with such grand points in our lives
for such grand decisions, at
this cosmic levels.

No, our wanderings from the path of Christ
happen in the small decisions we make.

The ones where, bit by bit, we diverge
from moving in the direction of
the realm of God.

It is in these temptations and in our
small decisions that one might find
themselves (even ourselves) working
against the practices and
the values of God's Realm. (Pause)

These days, I see the Church - catholic (small c),
the Church - universal,
the Church - Christian falling into
the temptations written to us today.

Especially in the North American context
we are witnessing the Christian Church
wandering from her calling to follow Jesus.

As Jesus leaned into who he was/is
in the wilderness with the devil,
the Church is leaning into who they
are/becoming when we stuff our bellies,
tempt God by feigning divine
protection for ourselves, or

as the church behaves unjustly, and
bows down to political leaders as she
hands over God's power for worldly power.

That is, after all, the heart of Christian nationalism.

When we circle the wagons.

Deal in the one way or the highway mentality.

When we claim that you're either
for a wall or for unprotected borders.

When there are a thousand
viable choices in between.

Common sense gun legislation,
reproductive rights, affordable housing,

you name it....

we feel forced to choose one extreme or the other.

Without considering there are many of good
decisions in between.

It is the work of those giving away
the power of divine authority in exchange
for the power of human authority.

So, in the gospel we behold two
figures in the wilderness (Jesus and the devil)
and in our day we behold two figures
in the United States
(the Church and the devil).

The crafty serpent still knows how
to reach out and touch our deepest desires.

That is, to be like God.

You see, we get tangled up in the
weeds of archetypes about good and evil,
but it is the little things that we do that
set us forth to hide from God. (Pause)

How often do we miss the important
points of the Genesis message?

Distracted we get, about the crafty serpent
(which God made, by the way) and
the variety of trees to eat from and
the one to not touch or eat.

I mean, every parent knows, as soon as
you tell a child to not do something
the sooner they're gonna do it, right!

We miss the points when we get
tangled in these weeds in the story.

It doesn't mean we throw it out, but it does mean
we need reminding to step back and view
the story as a whole and complete message.

One of them being, we do things
that cause us to have shame and that
shame leads us to try to hide from God.

That's the real tragedy here, isn't it?

Not that they ate the fruit in disobedience, not
that the serpent shouldn't have
been there in the first place, but
that the creation tries to hide
from the Creator. (Pause)

We ask, therefore, where is the liberation
and the life, if one is forced into hiding?

There isn't any.

Paul said, "The free gift is not like the trespass."

Those eight words will take a lifetime to understand,
but it doesn't mean we stop trying to understand...
to change and mature.

The greatest message of the Church should be this:

The church doesn't need to know what
you have done that causes shame.

God calls you out of hiding because
"the free gift is not like the trespass."

And also this, you are loved and forgiven...
You are tilled and made holy...

Come out of hiding.

AMEN!