

## Rebuking the Devil

Let's face it: the devil is everywhere. Do you see him . . . or her, or it? In the news? In the streets? In our world? In our day to day lives?

The devil is everywhere in the Bible, and is known by many names. Snake. Satan. Beelzebub. Tempter. Adversary. Prince of Darkness. Or simply, as in the Lord's Prayer, the Evil One. Jesus taught us to pray, very day, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Except in the original Greek, it's "deliver us from the Evil One [τοῦ πονηροῦ]." Almost as if it's inevitable that in our lives we will encounter the devil. Just as Jesus did. So we better see what we can learn from today's story.

In Matthew's version, Jesus' temptations happen just after he is baptized by John in the Jordan. After a divine dove alights on him, and a voice from heaven says "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." Man that must have felt good! I would guess he didn't want to leave! But in the very next verse the Holy Spirit leads him—or in Mark's version, pushes him—into the wilderness.

Why would the Holy Spirit do this? Was this somehow God's will? Part of God's plan? And is it part of God's plan that we too be tempted by the devil? Hold on to that question.

The same Greek word that means "to tempt"—πειράζω— can also be translated "to test." To determine, perhaps, whether Jesus had learned what he needed, whether he was ready for the mission to which God was calling him. What do you supposed would have happened if Jesus had failed the test? Would God have said, "[*buzzer sound*], you're out. Bring in the next candidate. This one's no good." I don't think so. God had already fully invested himself in Jesus. There's no way God would give up on him now. I think God would have kept on testing him until he got it right. Until Jesus himself knew that he was ready for his mission.

Of course, being God's Son, he didn't fail. His success was probably never in doubt. Except Matthew makes it quite clear throughout his story that Jesus is a fully human being. For starters, after fasting for forty days, Matthew tell us he was famished! That's what made it possible for the devil to tempt him in the first place.

Never forget that we too are fully human daughters and sons of God. Never forget, no matter what devil we might face, that God has already fully invested herself in us. There's no way that God is going to give up on any one of us. If or even when we fail.

Second, all three of Jesus' temptations hit him where he was most vulnerable. He was hungry. So the devil says, "Make some bread, Jesus—it's okay. You'll feel better. You need your strength!"

It was the beginning of his ministry, and was he unknown. No followers, no crowds. So the devil says, "Make a splash, Jesus! Do something spectacular! The people will be certain to hear about you that way. You'll have all the crowds you can imagine.

He was called by God to a momentous mission. So the devil says, "Don't just sit there, Jesus. Get busy! Make a difference! You're convicted, aren't you? The coming of God's kingdom depends solely on you. Let me give you these kingdoms to get you started." And

before long we start to believe that our success depends completely on us. We forget about our complete need for God. That's why, for some of us, it's almost necessary that we fail—that we fall. We need to, in order to get over ourselves. It's no surprise that the first step of any Twelve-Step program is to admit that we are powerless on our own. And the second step is to turn ourselves over to a higher Power.

Where are we most vulnerable? In what ways or at what times do we think it's all up to us?

Third, did you notice how well Jesus knew his Scripture? It was his foundation. It was the solid rock on which he could stand. No matter what the Evil One threw at him (including verses of scripture), Jesus had a reply. I know may sounds cliché, and smack of fundamentalist proof-texting. But, if only we knew the Bible as well as your average fundamentalist! I've been pastoring for twenty-one years, and I'm still catching up on my Bible knowledge

If we want to follow Jesus' example, we will find for ourselves one or more passages of scripture that are foundational, central—passages or entire biblical books to which we can turn and return when we are floundering. It is clear that one of Jesus' foundational books (or in his case, scrolls) was Deuteronomy. For example, Deuteronomy 8, about the people of Israel's forty years of wandering in the wilderness, and the concluding lesson that “one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the Mouth of the Lord” (Deut. 8:3; he nailed it!). Or Deuteronomy 6, and its centerpiece, verses 4-5, otherwise known as the Shema and still one of the most important passages of scripture for Jewish people today: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your hearts, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” Or 6:16: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” Or 6:13, “The Lord your God you shall fear; him you shall serve, and by his name alone you shall swear.”

What might some of our foundational, bedrock books or passages be? We could do a lot worse than Deuteronomy 6. But we can also turn to the New Testament, maybe even this story from the gospel of Matthew, chapter 4. Or the chapters that come right after it, chapters 5, 6, and 7, otherwise known as the . . . (“Sermon on the Mount”). Which includes such key passages as the Beatitudes, and the Lord's Prayer. I learned in my Anabaptist History class that many of our Anabaptist forebears knew the entire Sermon on the Mount by memory; why not us?

Fourth, let's return to Jesus' forty days of fasting. The number forty has huge significance in the Bible. The flood rains fell upon Noah for forty days and forty nights. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and nights, receiving God's law. The children of Israel were left to wander in the wilderness for forty years.

It's no coincidence that the season of Lent is exactly 40 days (not counting Sundays). And it is commonly considered to be in part a time of testing. To see if we're ready for our mission. Ready for the cross. Ready for the Resurrection. Ready to turn our lives completely over to God.

That's why many people either take on or “give up” something for Lent. Lois and Anna have decided to give up meat for forty days. I'm going to try to give up bread. A certain well-known female theologian announced on Facebook that she's going to give up Donald Trump. What are you going to give up for forty days? Or, what discipline are you going to take on? How about memorizing the Sermon on the Mount?

Fifth, and finally, let us learn from Jesus how to rebuke the devil. I did a Bible search on the term “rebuke,” I discovered that Jesus did a whole lot of rebuking. He rebuked the winds and the sea, after which there was a dead calm. He rebuked the demon in a young boy, and it came out of him. He rebuked Simon’s mother-in-law’s fever, and it left her, so that immediately she was able to get up and serve them. And he rebuked Simon himself, saying “Get behind me, Satan!” when Peter was trying to stop him from fulfilling his mission.

Or, was it the devil within Simon that he was rebuking so forcefully? Jesus’ command “Get behind me Satan!” comes awfully close to the four words he says in today’s story: “Away with you, Satan!” In the Greek, it’s even more simple; it’s two words: *ὑπαγε, σατανᾶ*. “Depart, Satan!” If any of you want me to write that down for you, just give me a call. Otherwise, I urge you to find your own way to rebuke the devil. Because you’re going to need it. How about “Hit the road, you Snake!” Or “Begone, Beelzebub!” Or, “Don’t let the door hit you on the way out, devil! I’m done with you!”

And some day, sooner or later, and with God’s help, we will be done with the devil.

Let’s see how Earl Wallace learned to rebuke the devil. Come on up here, Blue! Come testify to us!