

## SCRIPTURE READING FOR FEBRUARY 26, 2023 @ CAPC OAKLAND

### LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

Matthew, while listed first among the four gospels of the Second Testament was likely written after the book of Mark, which quotes. It tells the story, teachings and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

**THE WILDERNESS::** in Greek (and Hebrew) the word means wilderness, and desert. The “wild place” where one must depend upon God for survival. It’s to there that all the prophets always withdrew to listen for God’s voice and word. In a sense it’s the opposite of the region where humanity is in control (the city).

**DEVIL::** throughout the story different titles are used. Throughout the Second Testament Satan is a figure representing the power of evil, all that opposes the will of God. (Long 37). The term **SATAN** (*satanos* in Greek from Satan שָׂטָן in Hebrew) means “adversary” or “opponent.”

**forty days and forty nights::** Moses also fasted for 40 days and nights which is echoed here<sup>(28)</sup> Moses was there [on Mount Sinai where he received the 10 commandments] with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.). The number 40 evokes numerous significant events and underlines themes of judgement and testing in the Bible: such as the length of Noah’s flood (Genesis 7:4,12,17); Israel’s wandering for 40 years in the desert (Exodus 16:35). (Carter 108)

**If you are the Son of God::** the word IF is yet another signal that this is to be a test of Jesus’ identity and may be designed to create self-doubt in Jesus (“if you are..” being a much more subtle and effective assault on Jesus’ self-understanding than the more direct “you are not the son of God”). (Long) Remember that just before our text when Jesus is baptized, the heavens open and God’s Spirit descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from the heavens said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” – Matthew 3:16-17

**it is written::** Jesus defends himself, or responds to the temptations by quoting the Hebrew scriptures.

#### THE FIRST TEMPTATION (v1-4)

“The devil is attempting to beguile Jesus into making the nature of his work too small – satisfying hunger – and the recipients of his work too few – only one, himself.” Jesus’ answer to this temptation does not imply that providing bread to feed human hunger is a bad thing; it is just not the *only* thing. (Long 37). Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3 “<sup>1</sup>The entire commandment that I command you today you must diligently observe, so that you may live and increase and go in and occupy the land that the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors. <sup>2</sup> Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his

### Matthew 4:1-11 NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into **THE WILDERNESS** to be tested by the **DEVIL**. <sup>2</sup> He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was famished. <sup>3</sup> **THE TEMPTER** came and said to him, “If you are the son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” <sup>4</sup> But he answered, “It is written,

*‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”*

<sup>5</sup> Then the **DEVIL** took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, <sup>6</sup> saying to him, “If you are the son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,

*‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”*

<sup>7</sup> Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, *‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”*

<sup>8</sup> Again, the **DEVIL** took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, <sup>9</sup> and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, **SATAN!** for it is written,

*‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”*

<sup>11</sup> Then the **DEVIL** left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

### Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7 NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

<sup>15</sup> The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. <sup>16</sup> And the Lord God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, <sup>17</sup> but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”

<sup>1</sup>Now THE SERPENT was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” <sup>2</sup> The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup> but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” <sup>4</sup> But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die, <sup>5</sup> for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” <sup>6</sup> So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. <sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

#### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged you, enraged you, or surprised you in these texts?
- Throughout Lent we’re talking about the spiritual practice of seeking. To do so requires a posture of listening, staying open and curious instead of calloused and closed off. In today’s texts we see two different examples of listening. Seeking the fruit of the garden, Adam and Eve allow the snake’s manipulative voice to become louder than God’s voice. In the wilderness, Jesus defies the deception of the tempter by listening intuitively—to God, to his inner moral compass, to the teachings of his faith. And so, who will you listen to? What sources do you seek for news, information, and media? Whose voices—and what messages—take up too much space in your head?

#### LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

... commandments. <sup>3</sup> He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”

#### THE SECOND TEMPTATION (v5-7)

The devil mimics Jesus, quoting scripture, but leaving out the last part of verse 11 (in bold) from Psalm 91:11-12:

“<sup>11</sup>For he will command his angels concerning you

~~—to guard you in all your ways.~~

<sup>12</sup> On their hands they will bear you up,

so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.” The devil perverts the psalm in suggesting that it guarantees God’s protection, regardless of human faithfulness.” (Carter 110). Jesus is tempted to set the agenda, to do what he wants, not depend upon God’s direction. Jesus responds quoting Deuteronomy 6:16 ““Do not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.” – pointing to the story told in Exodus 17:1-7 in which the thirsty Israelites mistrust God when they have no water.

#### THE THIRD TEMPTATION (v8-11)

a very high mountain:: throughout the Hebrew Scriptures it’s in high places – mountains – that Gods’ will and word is often made known. Think of Abraham tested on Mount Horeb and blessed (Genesis 22:2; 12-18); Moses receives the 10 commandments on Mt Sinai (Exodus 19:20; Elijah retreats to Sinai (1 Kings 19:8); and the Romans/Greeks believed that the gods lives on Mt Olympus.

“this temptation may best be understood as the enticement to achieve the destination of this ministry without undergoing the sacrificial journey, to claim the victory without enduring the struggle. The ministry of Jesus will be hard and messy.” (Long 39) In a sense it’s an invitation to take a short cut, and not depend upon God. Israel of old failed through idolatry. Jesus will not. Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:13 but changes fear with worship and adding the word only to underline exclusive allegiance to God. “The Lord your God you shall **fear**, him you shall serve, and by his name **only** you shall swear.”

but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat:: Unrestricted freedom does not exist. Humanity is called upon by God to exercise restraint and self-discipline in the gratification of their appetite. Freedom has limits.

you will be like God, knowing good and evil:: this seems to be new mental powers with the capacity for reflection that allows a human being to make decisions independently of God.

- What invitation do you hear the Spirit of God speaking to you – or to us, as a church – to act, speak, be or change through this word of scripture?