

Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written,

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

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, 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.'"

Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Do you all remember the movie Bruce Almighty?

I liked it. It was one of those movies that was both funny and, at its core, had a great redemptive message.

For those who don't remember, or never saw it, the movie was about a Bruce Nolan, a TV news reporter (played by Jim Carey) who is having a terrible day at the beginning of the movie. That terrible day culminates with him not getting the promotion to the nightly news anchor position that he thinks he deserves, and he thought that he was going to get, which then leads to him lashing out on a live feed over the air. At the end of the day, as he is loading his car with his stuff after being fired, he mocks God for being a lousy God. And so, God lets him try it for a while. "If you think you can do a better job, here you go. I'm taking a vacation."

The scene that was bouncing around in my head this week was where Bruce had finally realized that he truly had been giving all the power of God and he was strutting down the street with the song, "I Got the Power" playing in the background, while he was doing all sorts of miraculous things. It was a hot day so with a swing of hand he popped the top off a fire hydrant for the kids to play in. He goes by a clothing store, looks at the clothes in the window, and suddenly what he is wearing switches with the clothes on the mannequin. He sees this gang that had harassed him earlier and he wrecks revenge on them by causing a monkey to appear from somewhere that they, well... normally don't.

He's got the power...and he is using it for his own purposes.

Which brings us to our passage from Matthew. Jesus has been sent into the wilderness to figure out something. He had just been told by his Father in heaven, as he came out of the Jordan River at his baptism, that he is God's Son and that God is well pleased in him. So, now Jesus needs to decide what he is going to do with that information. He's got the power, and the only hope that Satan has is that he will be able to get Jesus to turn that power inward.

And so, he brings his best game. Jesus has been in the wilderness, fasting for forty days and forty nights. He is hungry and weak and probably frustrated and tired of this wilderness thing. And in the middle of all that Satan appeals to the physical need that he has.

"Jesus, I know you're hungry. And I heard the words, just like you did, at that baptism thing. If those words are true, if you are the Son of God, *you've got the power*. Turn these rocks into bread and eat. Surely, your dad doesn't want you to be so hungry and in such pain. Eat! Enjoy. Be full."

But Jesus didn't fall for it. He understood power better than Satan did, or at least better than Satan seemed to. "One does not live, true life does not come, from bread alone. The fullness of power and the fullness of life comes from every word from the mouth of God."

Satan's appeal to the physical desires of Jesus didn't work, so he steps it up. He would appeal to the power that he rightly deserves as the Son of the Creator of all things. And now Satan uses the very thing that Jesus used in his response to the first temptation. He had to be thinking that there was no way around this Got-ya moment.

"Jesus, friend, I want only what is best for you and for humanity, too," Satan lies. "Show the world who you really are. Do it right here in Jerusalem, the holy city. Throw yourself off the Temple with great fanfare and when your Father sends his angels to protect and save you, as he promised to do in your Scriptures, the people see it and will worship you and make you their king. Jesus, buddy, it is only what is right. *You've got the power*. You deserve the power. Exert yourself and rule!"

"Do not put the Lord Your God to the test." You see, Jesus knew that if he was to stand in the place of humanity in order to bring the offer of reconciliation to all people, he needed to

submit himself in humility to God's plan. If he were to exert his will in order to gain power for himself, he would be doing the same thing that we heard about in the passage from Genesis this morning. He would be doing what Eve and Adam were tricked into doing in the garden. He would be claiming power for himself. In his humanity, he would be separating himself from God and, because of that, would lose the ability to be that sinless offering that would pay the price necessary to bring life back to everyone.

So, with temptation one and two failed, Satan had one last shot. He would throw everything in. All the riches, all the splendor, all the power. No more sleeping on the ground with rocks as pillows. No more aching, grumbling stomach, no more dirty robes and worn sandals. You can have everything that people hold in such reverence and esteem. All of it can be yours. It is in my power to give it to you. Worship me and it is yours.

But what Satan didn't understand, actually he probably did but he hoped that Jesus didn't; what needed to be understood is that Jesus did not come into the world to gain the world. He came to transform it and save it from itself. And with that recognition by Jesus, Satan was gone and the angels were immediate present to care for Jesus.

So, you see, our passage today is not just about temptation. It is about true power and where it comes from. Bruce Almighty was given the power that humanity has craved since the beginning. The desire to be God. And he took that power and instead of using it for the good of the world, instead of using it for the life of the world, he showed off, and he dressed up, and he exercised revenge. He gave people everything they asked for in their prayers so that they would leave him alone, even if it wasn't good for them. And he tried to force people, one person in particular, to do his will, rather than showing them the path to the true happiness they were created for and allowing them to choose that...or not.

Lent is a time when we get to look inward with humility and decide for ourselves, and accept for ourselves, the amazing gift God is offering us. But what we need to come to understand is that we are not God, we cannot do it on our own; that gift of life can only be obtained by depending on a power outside ourselves.

We only have the power, if, and when, we come to the point where we understand that we have no power at all. We only gain power, by relinquishing our perceived hold on it. We only wield power by humbly surrendering ourselves to the power of God.

Only at that point, only after all that, will we find that we have all power.

Amen.