

Sermon on the First Sunday in Lent
St. James Episcopal Church
San Francisco, California
February 25, 2007
by The Reverend Mary Moore Gaines

Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Psalm 91; Romans 10:8b – 13; Luke 4:1-13

When the devil had finished every test, he departed from [Jesus] until an opportune time. Luke 13

The invitation this morning is to the observation of a holy Lent, in new and deeper ways through our own personal wilderness experience.

Background for my reflection this morning is today's gospel and three additional sources.

For fourteen years I have been part of a group of about a dozen women who study the analytical psychology of Carl Jung, in a very low demand way, through tapes, books and mostly conversation. We talk about Jungian concepts like the collective unconscious, archetypes, the *persona*, the shadow, the *anima* and the *animus*. We've learned something about Jung, the man and his work. Most important is that we have learned a lot about ourselves.

Another rich source of collaboration and personal learning is St. James partnership with the California Counseling Institute next door whose mission is to integrate psychology, often Jungian based, and spirituality in their work with clients.

A third resource for me over the years has been author John Sanford. Sanford is an Episcopal priest and a Jungian analyst. His books, especially three of them, *The Kingdom Within*; *Dreams: God's Forgotten Language*; and *Evil: The Shadow Side of Reality* have been wonderful resources for the St. James Book Group and for me personally.

Going into the wilderness is a metaphor for exploring the unconscious side of one's personality. The conscious mind is but the tip of the iceberg.

Carl Jung wrote, *there are those who not satisfied with the dominants of conscious life, set forth – under cover and by devious paths, to their destruction or salvation – to seek the direct experience of the eternal*

roots, and following the lure of the restless unconscious psyche, find themselves in the wilderness. The challenge is to seek the direct experience of the eternal roots and to find ourselves in the wilderness.

This is not to replace things we normally do to observe a holy Lent. Giving up things that are not good for us, doing things that are good for us, and doing things that are good for others. It is rather a deeper look into our own unconscious through our own wilderness trip. How do you enter your wilderness? Quiet time. Meditation. Prayer. Yoga. Solitude. Dreams. Reading. Spiritual direction. Spiritual friendship. These are just some of the ways to go there, to have time in your own personal wilderness.

Hence my deep interest in today's Gospel story. From his baptism in the wilderness, his anointing by the Spirit and the affirmation of God, *Here is my son, my beloved. Listen to him,* Jesus is led or driven deeper into the wilderness by the same Spirit to be tempted by the devil. Is it another voice, or could it be God's voice in another form?

In any case the three temptations are all temptations to personal power – feeding the multitude represents social power; ruling the world represents political power; jumping off the pinnacle of the temple and being swept up by angels represents religious power. Jesus must look deeply into himself and find both the inner strength and the divine guidance to decide whom he will serve. His whole life will be an example of how to live, how to die and how to live again. It all gets decided in the wilderness.

When Jesus resists all three temptations, the devil departs *until an opportune time.* Then, and only then, does Jesus emerge from the wilderness and begin to call his disciples and begin his ministry.

Here is something that I find strange. The Beginner's Bible, the one I use to tell stories to the 2, 3 and 4 year olds (I like the pictures and the feel of the book, most of the time) in St. James Preschool Chapel every Wednesday morning does not include the story of today's Gospel, the temptation of Jesus by the devil in the wilderness. In The Beginner's Bible Jesus goes directly from his baptism, with the descent of the dove and the voice from heaven, to the call of the disciples: the fishermen, Peter, Andrew, James and John, whom Jesus invites to 'follow me.' Every year I fret mightily about the omission and wonder why this story, one of the most important in the gospels, is left out in this text for children.

Mind you, the Beginner's Bible includes: Adam and Eve and their banishment from the Garden of Eden, complete with the angel with the flaming sword at the entrance to the Garden to make sure they don't/can't get back in. So much for paradise. They include the story of Noah, which is really the story of an angry God who regretted his whole creation and wiped it out by drowning it in a great flood, except for those chosen few who squeezed, two by two, into the ark. The Beginner's Bible includes the story of the brothers Jacob and Esau and the devious trick their mother played to be sure her favorite was favored. Also included is the bad King Herod who was angry, jealous and who was determined to kill the beautiful baby Jesus. It includes the crucifixion, although the three crosses are shown far away on a hillside in the sunset. Violence, anger, deception, death are all included.

So, why do you suppose they left out the story of Jesus being led/driven into the wilderness and tempted by the devil? My sense is that while the editors could handle the serpent in the garden, the anger of the bad king, and even the anger of God, they couldn't handle putting the devil, the personification of evil, in a children's bible. Now my question, to you and to myself, is "Why not?"

My guess is that, consciously or unconsciously, the editors of the Beginner's Bible didn't want to deal with the problem of evil.

In the New Testament and in our Christian theology, God is all good and Satan and/or the devil (they are used interchangeably) is all evil. Christians have always had a hard time knowing what to do with evil as part of the whole. Our 'fix' is to project evil out onto the devil or onto the 'other.' The problem is we also then tend to project our own will to power, our own evil tendencies, out onto the 'other,' making it very difficult to own and deal with these human impulses in ourselves, with unhealthy, sometimes disastrous, consequences for ourselves and for the world.

John Sanford in his book *Evil: The Shadow Side of Reality* does a fascinating analysis of the problem of Evil. Evil in mythology; Evil in the Old Testament; the Role of the Devil and Evil in the New Testament; the Devil in Post-Biblical Mythology and Folklore. And much more.

Just to whet your appetite. In the whole of the Old Testament there are only four references to Satan and none of these is central to the

story. In the New Testament however, there are seventy-two references to the devil or Satan, as well as numerous other references to 'the enemy,' 'Beelzebub' or 'Prince of this world.'

Why is this? Sanford believes that the reason there are so few references to Satan in the Old Testament is that "in the Old Testament it was Yahweh Himself Who was responsible for evil so the figure of a devil was not necessary." Consider Isaiah 54:16, Good News Bible translation, "I create the blacksmith who builds the fire and forges the weapons. I also create the soldier who uses the weapons to kill." Sanford says, "We may be bothered by the idea that God sends evil as well as good, but it nevertheless presents us with a bold and unflinching monotheism."

The reality of life is that good and evil are not always so far apart, and sometimes we don't know where the good is and where the evil is. In the film *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Nikos Kazantzakis declares, "Someone came. Surely it was God, God . . . or was it the devil? Who can tell them apart? They exchange faces; God sometimes becomes all darkness, the devil all light, and the mind of man is left in a muddle."

A powerful and current example of this muddle is Clint Eastwood's film, *Letters from Iwo Jima*.

God willing, I will continue these thoughts next Sunday. Meanwhile, I invite you to the observance of a Holy Lent and pray that we will allow ourselves, like Jesus, to be led by the Spirit into the wilderness, the wilderness of our unconscious through quiet time, solitude, meditation, prayer, dreams, reading, spiritual direction, spiritual friendship.

May we have the will and the way to face and understand our own temptations and contradictions and to emerge more fully ourselves, beloved of God, warts and all!