

Child of God & Temptation

Mark 1:9-15 & 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

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January 18, 2015

2nd Sunday after Epiphany



worthy of love
and respect,
capable of
making

In your bulletin this morning you should have a little card that looks like this, with these words on it: I am a child of God, worthy of love and respect, capable of making a positive difference in the world today. This card is intended to remind you and help you with the spiritual discipline I invited you to take up this month. Each day to stand in front of a mirror and say out loud:

I am a child of God, worthy of love and respect, capable of making a positive difference in the world today.

This discipline is rooted in the good news of the Christmas story. The good news as John tells it is that all who receive Christ, who accept him and welcome him into their hearts and their lives, will have the power to become children of God, to become their true selves, this child-of-God selves (Eugene Petersen, *The Message*).

Last Sunday, Vicar Aleese talked about the role of the Holy Spirit in creation and in the baptism of Jesus. She told us about the role of the Holy Spirit in our own baptism and in our life together. The Holy Spirit is the one who leads, who directs, who guides, and who helps us in our journey to become our child-of-God selves.

Today's Gospel lesson reading from the 1st chapter of Mark takes us back to that moment of Jesus' baptism, that moment when the Holy Spirit descends into him and God claims him as God's own beloved Son. We see Jesus being affirmed as God's beloved Son even before he has preached his first sermon, before he has taught any parable, healed any person, or cast out any demon. Like Jesus, we too are claimed in the waters of baptism as God's beloved sons and daughters — in many cases even before we could walk or talk or do much of anything besides eat, sleep and mess our diapers. The point is that being and becoming a "child of God" is not something we earn. It's not a reward for doing good deeds or believing the right things. Child of God is who and what we are created to become. But how does that happen? How do we grow into our child-of-God selves, our true selves?

Let's see what happens to Jesus after his baptism. Mark tells us that the Holy Spirit immediately — still dripping wet from the River Jordan — drove Jesus into the wilderness, where over a forty day period he was tempted by Satan, surrounded by wild beasts, and ministered to by angels. That's it. The details of Jesus' dialogue with Satan are found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. In all three gospels, however, Jesus' temptation in the wilderness is the bridge — the transition point — between his baptism and the beginning of his ministry.



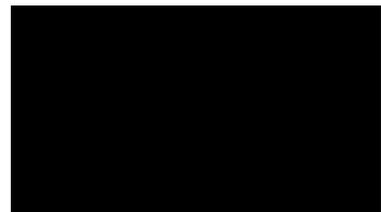
Jesus' temptation occurs not because he has wandered off the straight and narrow path of righteousness. Jesus is in the wilderness being tempted precisely because that is where the Spirit has led him. Jesus temptation is not about his personal morality, but a contest about the shape and nature of his ministry. The choices Satan offers him are not obviously evil. Turn stones to bread. In a world of chronic hunger, why not? Leap from the pinnacle of the temple. In a world cynical to religious claims, why

not shock and awe people into believing? Take over the kingdoms of the world. In a world of slavery, war, oppressions and disregard for life, why not impose justice and mercy? Jesus' temptation is not a sign of his personal weakness, but rather of his strength. He is capable of doing all the things Satan challenges him to do. The temptations are a test of his loyalty to the God who has claimed him as the beloved Son. They are a necessary part of discerning how Jesus will use his God-given capacities.¹ Will Jesus' life and ministry be shaped by God's will or by human appetites and aspirations?

The reading from 1 Corinthians shows us that followers of Jesus face similar temptations in every day life. Paul writes, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are beneficial. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be dominated by anything" (6:12). I am capable of doing all kinds of things. Not all of them are beneficial to me or to the people around me. Some of the things that I am capable of doing will make a positive difference in the world. But I am just as capable of doing things that are physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually harmful to me and to the people around me. Some of the things I am capable of doing are addictive and destructive. How I satisfy my appetite for things like food and sex can hinder or help not only my growth as a child of God, but might seriously cripple someone else's journey to become a child of God.

When God claims us, God claims the whole person. "Child of God" is not a like a name tag we wear on Sunday morning at church and then leave behind when we step out into the world. Child of God is who we are created to be in the midst of a world that often looks and feels like a wilderness where wild things dwell, where Satan tests our loyalty to God, and tempts us to use our God-given abilities in harmful ways.

This is really heavy duty stuff. Listen now as one of my favorite authors — Rob Bell — invites us to think about this process using a different set of metaphors.



¹ Fred B. Craddock, "Testing that Never Ceases," *Christian Century* 1990:211, available at www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=708.

[Video excerpt from Rob Bell's *Rhythm*. Here's a transcript of what he says:

When I think of God I hear a song. It's a song that moves me. It has a melody. It has a groove. It has a certain rhythm. People have heard this song for thousands and thousands of year, across continents and cultures and time periods. People have heard this song, and they've found it captivating, and they've wanted to hear more.

Now there have always been people who say there's no song and who deny the music. But the song keeps playing. And so...

Jesus came to show us how to live in tune with the song. It's like he is the way, the truth and the life. This isn't a statement about one religion being better than all the other religions. The last Jesus wanted to do was start a new religion. He came to show us reality at its most raw. He came to show us how things are.

Jesus is like God taking on flesh and blood. In his generosity, in his compassion — that's what God's like. In his telling the truth — that's what God's like. In his love and his forgiveness and his sacrifice — that's what God's like. That's who God is. That's how the song goes.

The song is playing all around us all the time. The song is playing everywhere. It is written on our hearts. Everybody is playing the song. See the question isn't whether or not you're playing the song. The question is are you in tune?]

God is like a song that is playing every where always. Jesus came to show us how to live in tune with that song. Becoming a child of God, growing and developing into our true child-of-God selves involves learning from Jesus how to live in tune with the song. Jesus' temptation in the wilderness teaches us that every temptation, test and trial we face in daily life is about the question: are you in tune? Beloved child of God, would you like to be in tune with the song that is God? Will you dare to be in tune?