

“I am the vine, you are the branches; abide in me and you will bear much fruit.” John 15:5

Vine & Branches

from St. Elizabeth's Episcopal Church, 720 N. King Street, Honolulu, HI 96817 • Phone (808) 845-2112

Weekly Edition
March 9, 2022

Chicken or Egg?

Why do we find ourselves with Jesus in the desert this morning? What's going on with his encounter with the adversary of God? This one we call Satan?

What's at stake in this seemingly God forsaken place? At first it seems that Jesus is confronted with the three most common temptations that humans face.

Shiny beads that so often mesmerize us. The temptation to be well fed. “Turn this stone into bread!”

And satisfy your hunger — forever. The temptation to be rich. “Worship me and you'll have every kingdom in the world!”

Making you fat and happy all the days of your life. The temptation to be famous.

“Throw yourself off the temple and God will miraculously save you!” And people will beg for your autograph, and admire your face on the cover of People magazine. These are the common temptations we all face in one form or another, as we muddle through this life.

As we struggle with the family budget. As we wonder whether we'll be comfortable in retirement. As I wring my hands over what my neighbor's thinking of me.

But what's happening in the desert isn't only about a fat belly or a fat bank account or being a famous Freddy. The confrontation between Jesus and the devil is also about power. The power to create bread, and therefore become a source for hungry people to be fed.

A power used to manipulate people. To dominate them. To enslave them. As in the famous story of the Grand Inquisitor when Jesus returns, in a small Italian village in the 1500's. “He comes softly, unobserved, and yet, strange to say, everyone recognizes Him.”

As he sets about healing people. Even raising a small child from the dead. The Cardinal, the Grand Inquisitor, who enforces the rules of the faith, promptly arrests Jesus, confronting Jesus about his return: “You offer people freedom, but we give them bread. And people will always choose bread over freedom.”

Which leads to the second temptation about power during this struggle in the desert. The power to rule over others. “Worship me and all of these kingdoms are yours to command.” We see this playing out tragically today in Ukraine. A Russian dictator decides to rule over a sovereign people, and thousands needlessly die.

Third, and the most tempting power of all, the power to command God to act is offered by Satan to Jesus this morning.

“He will save you if you throw yourself down from the temple heights!” We see this power on display in what's called the Prosperity Gospel.

That warped form of Christianity that says “God owes me!” As one writer puts it, “The gospel of prosperity turns Christianity into a vapid bless-me club, with a doctrine that is little more than spiritual magical thinking. If you pray the right way, God will make you rich.” Cathleen Falsani, Washington Post.



The Right Reverend
Robert L. Fitzpatrick
V Bishop of Hawaii

The Reverend
David J. Gierlach
Rector

The Reverend
Imelda S. Padasdao,
Priest Associate

The Reverend Peter S. M. Fan,
Cantonese Language Priest

Fr. Mafi Vakameilalo,
Priest Associate

Hsiao Ying “Ajaon” Chen
Choir Director

Bill Slocumb
Parish Administrator

—
Cathy Lowenberg
Senior Warden

Moses Langi
Junior Warden

Dawn Morais
Secretary

Tricia Castro
Treasurer

www.stelizabeth720.org
stelizabethhawaii
@gmail.com

So perhaps this time in the desert isn't only about common temptations, but it's also about power.

How we seek it. How it corrupts. And like Jesus does with the common temptations, so he does with the temptations to power.

Jesus, because he is following a different vision, rejects these temptations.

But I think something else is playing out in the desert this morning. Something much more profound than merely rejecting common temptations.

Something even more profound than walking away from the lure of power.

Something that is instead — cosmic. Something fundamental to the entire fabric of creation.

Today, in the desert, that age old question, "What came first, the chicken or the egg?" — is at stake.

Not literally the chicken or the egg, but the fundamental 'what comes first' question.

As in, what comes first, the material world — or consciousness? Science teaches us that it all began with a big bang. And from that came matter.

And eventually from all that matter came us! With our big brains. And from our big brains — comes consciousness. According to science, since the brain creates consciousness, when we die, our consciousness dies too.

Which is why we have wars and greed and racism and all the other evils of humanity. Because something in us says: this is all there is!

So grab what you can while you can because it's not lasting forever! That's Satan's view.

And thus the focus on fame, fortune and power. But what if consciousness exists before the big bang? What if consciousness causes the big bang? What if consciousness creates matter? Uses matter?

Occupies matter (like the brain) but is not constrained, controlled or limited by it? Isn't that the great drama playing out in the desert this morning?

The devil insists that this material world is the source and summation of all life, and dares Jesus to agree.

Jesus, however, sits in the truth that this world is only a way station. That spirit and thought and consciousness exist before, and independently of, this material world.

And will continue after all that is material is transformed into a new heaven and a new earth.

These two ways of understanding reality bring us to a fork in the road. They set before us profoundly different ways to live life.

And it forces us to reimagine what we think our faith is all about. Christianity has come to be seen as a private relationship with a far away God.

A God who, if I cross certain "T's" and dot certain "I's" promises I will secure a condo in the sky when I die — in the sweet bye and bye.

But that's not what Jesus is about. "The Christian Faith is not a set of personal values or spiritual preferences. It's a claim about the very nature of reality." Murray Rae.

That, as Paul comes to see so vividly, Jesus "is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. Through him all things are created, in heaven and on earth. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." Col. 1:15-17.

We are invited to see, through compassion and self-giving, through selfemptying, the ultimate discovery. That all that is — is not only connected, it is indeed One.

It allows us to grasp the truth that "the cosmos is fundamentally and primarily alive ... and that Christ, through the incarnation, is rooted in the world, even in the tiniest atom." T. de Chardin.

Even in the vast expanse of interstellar space.. None other than Thomas Aquinas, the great doctor of the church, declared that in Christ, "God becomes human so that humans may become God, sharing in the divine nature."

Which, I know, is hard to believe these days. Looking around at the world as it is often leaves us shaking our heads and wondering if anything faith says is true.

And yet, "our age and the age of the first century, when Jesus walked those dusty roads, have more in common than we think.

Both eras are cosmically scared, frightened ages, caught under principalities and powers where tiny little human beings know that they cannot do much. That they are not in control. That they are just trapped" Krister Stendahl. modified.

But we are not tiny little human beings. We are created in the very image of the living God.

We are co-creators with the God who is in all things, guides all things, and loves all things. The divine holds all things.

Gives birth to all things. As St Nicholas of Cusa discovered, "the divine is in all things, and all things are in the divine."

This is the great drama playing out in the desert today. It's a drama that demands an answer from us, just as it demands an answer from Jesus.

Shall we claim our inheritance as children of God? As beloved companions of the consciousness that holds all things together?

Or shall we exchange our heritage, our destiny, for some shiny beads?

This is Lent.

What shall our answer be?

Quotable Quotes From Notable Folks

Yes, gas prices are high.

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We can choose to travel less.
We can choose to carpool.
We can choose to bicycle.
We can choose to walk.
We can choose public transportation.

UKRAINE CANNOT

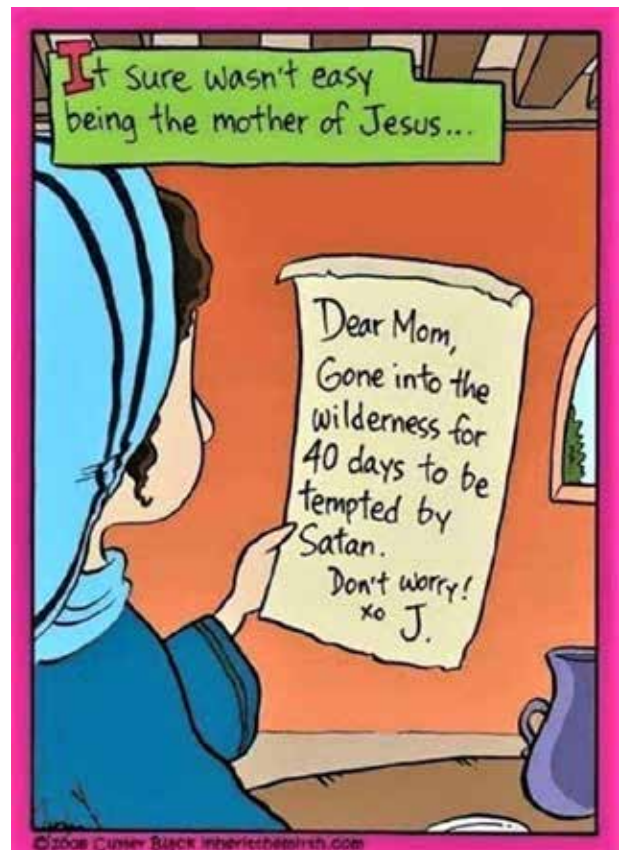
And there,
but for grace,
go we.

Marguerite Quaintance



"It is now highly feasible to take care of everybody on Earth at a higher standard of living than any have ever known. It no longer has to be you or me. Selfishness is unnecessary. War is obsolete. **It is a matter of converting the high technology from weaponry to livingry.**"

- R. Buckminster Fuller

A photograph of R. Buckminster Fuller, an older man with glasses, wearing a dark suit and tie. He is standing in front of a large, geodesic dome structure, which is the Buckminster Fuller Institute. The background shows a clear sky and some trees.

"Let me pray about that"

The Art of Spiritual Discernment: St. James' Parish Lenten Discussion

A five-week course of study with Br. David Vryhof, SSJE Wednesdays, 6 PM, starting March 9th, via ZOOM

(Note: The course will be offered again after Easter at St. Columba's)

"The Great Resignation" - people retiring, leaving positions, changing jobs, the pandemic has nudged a lot of folks into a time of discernment. When we pray about the choices that we face in life, what are we hoping will happen? How does God speak to us, and how can we be opened to receiving God's direction? What are the ways in which we can expect God to guide and direct our paths? How do you discover what God is calling you to do at this time in your life? Friend of our parish and priest and monk of the Episcopal Monastery, Society of St. John the Evangelist, Br. David Vryhof, has put together five talks for us to address these questions and more.

These talks are on video and you have two ways to view them: 1) You can watch (or listen in your car or out walking/running, etc.), by accessing the videos on the SSJE website (see link below) then join us at 6 PM on that Wednesday for discussion. We will be paused by 7:15 PM. 2) We will also open up the ZOOM room at 5:15 PM and share the video over the screen.

Here are the links you'll need: To watch early, register with SSJE to have access to the videos by going to: https://www.ssje.org/2021/09/14/discernment_in_prayer/

To join the ZOOM room to watch the video at 5:15 PM, or to join at 6 PM for our time of discussion, go to: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7018021953> Meeting ID: 701 802 1953

Session One: What is spiritual discernment?

Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice." How can we learn to listen for that voice, recognize it, and follow where it leads?

Session Two: What do we mean when we speak of someone's 'calling' or 'vocation'? Do I have a 'calling' in life? Is there something that I am meant to be or to do? What does it mean to have a 'vocation' and how will I recognize whether or not my 'calling' is from God?

Session Three: What can we learn about 'vocation' from the life of Jesus? Did Jesus have a sense of his own vocation? What would he say that he was called to be or to do? How did he come to that sense of vocation?

Session Four: How can I discover my own 'calling' in life? Are there particular methods or techniques that I can use to discover my 'vocation'? Where and how can I begin to look for God's purpose for my life?

Session Five: Is there a proven method of discernment that I can follow when faced with an important life choice? All of us make important choices in life: choices that will define our future, and shape who and what we become. How can we bring these choices into the realm of prayer? How will we recognize which choice might be God's preferred choice for us? How might God answer our prayer that "Thy will be done"?