

Remembering Who You Are

First Sunday in Lent; Series A

Matthew 4:1-11

So there I was spending eight hours on a Saturday with around fifty grown men sitting at tables, watching a video, and relating the video to our lives through silent reflection and group discussions. Does this sound like a “manly” thing to do or what?

The event was a one day men’s retreat at Christ Lutheran Church. A handful of men from Atonement represented our congregation there. During the eight hours this group of fifty men talked about “stepping up” and “being men” by *assuming* responsibility in their various vocations that God has given them as sons, brothers, husbands, fathers, Christians, and coworkers, among others. Often times men do one of two things, they either *abandon* that responsibility or they *abuse* that responsibility. They either run from the responsibility in laziness and passivity or they use the responsibility as an excuse for being abusive and aggressive. Because these kinds of topics were discussed and confronted “head on” this event could accurately be described as a very “manly” event.

At one point during the eight hours the entire group watched a pretty funny video about a guy wearing a suit and a tie who enters a bar at nine o’ clock in the morning, orders a ginger ale and waits for his potential future employer to come and interview him for a job in a lumber yard. It is just this well-dressed man and the bartender alone in the establishment. As the scene plays out the bartender learns why the man is there and begins to convince him that if he is going to even have a chance at getting a job in a lumber yard, he needs to “man up.” The soon-to-be-interviewee obeys the bartender’s every suggestion about how he is to achieve the goal of “manning up.” He rips off his tie, throws his suit coat to the ground, orders a beer, dishevels his hair, and even tears off the sleeves on his long sleeve dress shirt in order to fit the bartender’s ideal of “being a man” and “manning up.” Of course the scene then ends with the interviewee’s potential future employer walking into the bar dressed in a suit and tie, sitting right next to him and ordering a ginger ale. If we are not confident and sure of who we are, what we believe, and why we believe it then is easy to fall for a lot of seemingly innocent suggestions.

I have heard a number of concerned Christian fathers say this to their sons and daughters just before sending them off to college, “Remember who you are.” We might even add, “Remember whose you are.” If it is true that what we do is connected to and flows from what we believe, then it makes sense that these concerned fathers would want their children to always remember what they believe about who they are and whose they are.

I bring all of this up this morning because the Gospel reading calls us to consider the topic of temptation generally, and the event of Jesus’s temptation specifically. As we read and reflect on the temptation of Jesus it becomes very clear what Satan is trying to do to Jesus through the tool of temptation. Quite bluntly, Satan is trying to get Jesus to forget who he is. He says to Jesus two times in the eleven verse scene, “If you are the Son of God” (Mt 4:3, 6). He is trying to get him to question his identity as the Son of God, the “Christ,” the “Savior from Sin.” If Satan can get Jesus to doubt, question, and even abandon his identity then maybe Jesus will abandon his plan as the savior. Then Satan would win. He too knows that what we do is connected to what we believe.

Every day we confront things and even people in our lives that lead us to forget who we are as God's "bought-back," redeemed children. I once heard a speaker who was trying to illustrate this point with a hat that he made. He called it his "hat O' temptation." It was hat with different objects attached to fishing line and dangling from the brim. The objects were a dollar bill, a beer can, a Barbie doll, and toy car. Things that are not bad or harmful in and of themselves but they are things that are a part of everyday life and can be used and abused in a way that lead us to forget who we are. When you put the hat on these objects were unavoidable. Everywhere you walk there the objects are dangling right before your eyes, obstructing your vision. As we well know from our own experience with these objects and many others, misuse and abuse is inevitable. It is all too easy for us to "forget" who we are. Though we are God's redeemed children, we are weak and we often fail and fall short in carrying out the responsibilities that God has given to us. As the Old Testament reading reminded us, we are sons and daughters of Adam and Eve!

In the New Testament we have eleven letters that were written by the Apostle Paul. Two of those letters were written to the Christian congregation in the city of Corinth, Greece to address various problems that had arisen in the congregation and were threatening their life together in unity as the body of Christ, the Church. There were things that were leading the Corinthians to forget who they were as Christians. So Paul writes in order to remind them of their identity. In one of the final chapters of Second Corinthians he speaks about some of his own struggles as an Apostle. This is where we hear about Paul's "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor 12:7) and speculate as to what he might be referring to. In any case Paul's "thorn" appears to be some kind of struggle or temptation with which he is personally facing. In the midst of this struggle he cries out, "For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor 12:10).

Brothers and sisters in Christ, there *is* power in your weakness. This is because you are not your own. You were bought with a price (1 Cor 6:20). When you and I were baptized we were baptized into the Christ, the faithful second Adam who fought Satan and won. We are baptized into the one who faced every temptation known to man and prevailed. We are baptized into the one who mocked death by rising from it. You have the strength of this Christ every day.

Many of you may have noticed that in newsletter articles and emails I always end the same way. I end with the two-word phrase, "in Christ," and then sign my name. This is intentional. For the New Testament writers to be "in Christ" is to be baptized into his name and his identity. It is to have the promise of Christ and his forgiveness, life, and salvation. To be "in Christ" is to be adopted into the household of God as a child of God and have the guarantee of an eternal inheritance as an heir of our Heavenly Father's kingdom. All of this is to say being "in Christ" is *who you are*. It is your identity. By ending my articles and emails with all of you as your Pastor it is just one little way of reminding myself and you of *who we are*.

By the grace of God let's leave here today remembering who we are and striving to be who we are. The best way to do it? By being forgiveness people. The world wants us to seek revenge and hold grudges but that is not who we are. We are people who have received God's great gift of love and forgiveness. When we fall into the trap of forgetting who we are in our weakness, make mistakes and give into temptations, we ask for God's forgiveness. We receive it and believe it. We ask others to forgive us. We freely give forgiveness when our Christian brothers and sisters have forgotten who they are in a moment of weakness. And we gather together on Sunday morning to receive God's forgiveness anew. The rhythm of remembering and living out who we are. Amen.