

Today's reading from Matthew is the temptation of Jesus. I heard or read the story countless times as we all have. We know that Jesus was led into the wilderness and fasted for forty days. We know that the devil tempted him and the end of his journey. And we know that Jesus rejected Satan's requests and offers. So, I tried to think of something new that I could say about this that you haven't already heard.

I really thought and thought about it. I tried to work a sermon out of what we've been doing in confirmation. I thought about how I can tie in the sermon with any job I've had. I thought about how bad of a week I was having and how it could apply to that. And I went back and read the verse again.

This time I didn't just read the verse. I read the gospel from the beginning. I read about the birth of Christ. I read about the wisemen traveling and Herod dying, with Joseph taking Jesus out of Egypt and back to Israel. I even reread Jesus' baptism and John the Baptist. I read how the Spirit came out of the water and led Jesus into the wilderness. And then I read about John the Baptist getting arrested and Jesus leaving Nazareth and moving to Galilee.

That was when I realized that I had been reading this incorrectly for years. I had always thought that Jesus' temptation came after he had been doing his ministry for some time. I don't know why I thought this. I guess I never really thought much about when Jesus started his ministry. I just knew that it was later in his life.

But this wasn't in the middle or the end of his teachings. It was before he really started his ministry. He was still living in Nazareth, and by this point had taken over Joseph's business. He hadn't started really gathering his disciples or sharing the word of God on such a large scale.

I understand that this realization doesn't change the story or meaning behind it. But, it changes my perception of the story. And that changes my interpretation of Jesus' responses. I had always taken the reading as a simple example of what Jesus had already done and was simply refuting a nay-sayer as it were.

As people, we always try to take the simplest approach. Why make life harder on ourselves if we don't have to. Why would we work harder to accomplish less? It does happen, I've seen so many people over the years, work harder to get out of doing something than if they just did the task. I'm sure we all know someone like that. But generally we take the shortest and simplest route to accomplish a task.

With that being said, I thought that Jesus had been preaching with his disciples for so long by this time. But he hadn't. This is important because when you say or do something enough times, you believe it. It becomes reflexive as a response. You don't have to think about it, you just do it. I haven't worked for SPIN! Pizza now for 6 years, but every time I hear a phone ring I want to answer it and say, "Thank you for calling SPIN! Pizza. This is Bryce. How may I help you?"

So, I had always thought this was a natural involuntary response for Jesus, like when you blindly reach for a tool from muscle memory. But it wasn't. Yes, by this point in time, Jesus had known that he was the son of God. We remember that he had stayed in the temple when he was 12 to talk with the priests about the Torah and the teachings of God. But sitting in a room with a number of people having a bible study is much different than being alone in the wilderness, starving, and exhausted.

Now that I have a fresh perspective on the time, I really appreciate Jesus' stand more than I did before. When the devil first tries to get Jesus to turn the stones to bread and he denies him, think about how hard it would be if it were you.

You're tired and hungry. You could easily make yourself something to eat, take a shower, and go to bed. But instead you go to your kids basketball game or you help them with their homework. You sit down and listen to a friend who you know is having a rough day, or week, or year. In those situations it's easy to do the right thing, because you care about the other person and you've been doing it for a while.

But instead of doing those things, now you're tired and hungry and someone you don't like calls you and asks you for a favor. Or you see an accident on the side of the road. These are things that you could easily walk away from especially if you haven't fully devoted your life to God. It is easier to ignore these and walk away than it would be to do the right thing.

We do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. God nourishes us and protects us by his teachings. This would be pretty hard to believe at the beginning of your faith journey. Especially since he had fasted for 40 days like Moses.

When that failed, the devil placed Jesus on the peak of the temple and told him to have God's angels guide him down. But, Jesus tells him that it is written to not put God to the test. And how many times do people present ultimatums to get their way? I want you to do this or I'll quit. If this person doesn't say what I want then I'm leaving and I'm taking my toy with me. That isn't showing faith in God, that is testing his will and the fortitude of others.

So many times people believe that they are in the right and that their perception of a situation is how it truly is. But nothing in our world is one dimensional. We cannot perceive anything like that. Everything is at the very least 2 dimensions and that gives everything at least 2 perspectives. By giving ultimatums and creating a limited solution, we test God's purpose for us and others as well as his teachings.

We know that it is written many times in the Bible to follow only God serve him and not false gods or others. But we do that on so many levels and do not realize it. We all worship God in our own way. And I'm not saying that everyone needs to be in the pews every Sunday; granted it would be nice, but not everyone worships God like that.

But, we do fall to peer pressure and spend a little more time than we should watching TV or on social media. We believe things that people tell us easily without really discerning over what God would say about it. Our faith falters more readily at the beginning of our journey than when we have traveled the course.

We are all so fragile at the beginning of a journey or task. We can question whether we are doing the right thing. We might even question the motives of those who are trying to help us. But, everyone has been there, even Jesus. His faith and discernment carried him through, much like ours will if we let it. Amen.