

Certitude is Dangerous, I'm Certain!

[Text - Luke 4:1-13]

Pastor Dave Shackle
March 10., 2019

This morning's ancient story of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness, remains as relevant today, as when it was first told. That's because it reminds us that, throughout history, one of the greatest temptation to those who seek to serve the Holy One, is the allure of power and control. The tempter says to Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread....Bow before me, and the power of all the kingdoms of the world will be yours....Throw yourself from the top of the temple, for it is written that God will command the angels to protect you!" [The idea here being that if Jesus dazzles the people with a display like that, they will do whatever he commands.]

Each of these temptations is devilishly cunning! They present Jesus a way in which he could adjust his standards [*just slightly*] in order to achieve some truly noble things. And who among us hasn't toyed with the idea of bending our ethics [*just slightly*] in order to get the advantage we need, to deal with Life's complex problems? We may even find a *Scripture* passage to help us rationalize our decision to act in a more controlling or forceful manner. But here's the catch: just because something is found in *Scripture*, doesn't make it the "Word of God!" There are Bible passages that advocate slavery, sexism, racism, and barbaric violence - including the annihilation of one's enemies, down to the last man, woman, child and animal! You see, it's not just from the *Koran* that a person can pull cruel and violent passages; they're also found in our own Bible - primarily in the part we call the Old Testament, which would have been *Jesus'* "Bible"!

Perhaps this is why, as Jesus is developing his understanding of what it means to be a faithful Child of the Holy One, he wrestles in the wilderness to determine which religious practices - and writings - he will respect and emphasize, and which ones he will reinterpret or reject. And while it would have been expedient for him to latch-onto those Scriptures that encourage exercising authority and exerting power, Jesus firmly resists that temptation. He has certainly seen plenty of religious and political leaders who are far more interested in controlling and using people, rather than helping and caring for them. Jesus knows how power and position can tempt and corrupt even those who may begin with the best of intentions. So he steadfastly resolves that he will not give in to the temptation of power and domination. Instead, he determines that he will humbly go-about doing good - by performing acts of kindness and compassion, healing and service.

In those times when he does display the Divine power which brings healing and wholeness, Jesus instructs people to tell no one. [He's helping them for *their* benefit, not to boost his own ego.] And in those instances when the crowd tries to make Jesus their champion and king, he quietly slips away. For Jesus, being a genuine Child of the Holy One means that he will let *God* be God; and he will trust that his life, and the lives of all those around him, are ultimately in the capable care of our Compassionate Creator.

Believing that his Divine Source loves him with an unwavering love, allows Jesus to let-go of his own need for power or prestige, and to take-on the role of a humble and compassionate servant. And when that final temptation comes: to choose between facing death, or abandoning the message and mission of all-inclusive Divine Love, Jesus once again trusts in that never-ending Love. The Good News of our Faith, is that even when the forces of fear and death claim the life of Jesus, the greater power of Divine Life and Love re-claim him - revealing the way to

true and everlasting life.

In every religious tradition - be it Christian or Jewish, Islamic or Buddhist, Hindu or Voodoo - there are people who are attracted by the allure of the personal power, or the spiritual superiority, which that faith-system might offer. These people will focus on those few places in their sacred scriptures that emphasize domination over those who are different, judgment and condemnation of the "outsider" - rather than those many scriptures that speak about compassion and unity, service and equality. They will use their religious practice as an excuse to practice their own prejudices and hatreds; rather than a sacred pathway to tolerance, wholeness and peace. In every religion, there are people who give-in to the temptation of power; and there are those who surrender to the Divine Call for service and self-giving love. And just as this duality can be found in all religions, a similar duality - between the desire to control others, and the willingness to serve them - can be found in the hearts of all people, including you and me.

Even in the best of our relationships, we can still be tempted to hold-back; to try to maintain control; to guard against appearing weak or vulnerable. Yet the more we try to protect our lives and to hold-on to our sense of power and control, the more we actually lose. This is why we must remind ourselves of these basic truths: That being kind to others, is actually a kindness to ourselves. And that freely sharing our lives, really does set us free!

The more you and I learn to trust in the overflowing power of Divine Love, the more strength and courage we will have to overcome the temptations that come our way. We will joyfully claim and proclaim the Good News: That we are *all* beloved children of the Holy One! And as Divinely connected children, we will treat all our sisters and brothers with patience and openness, compassion and respect. The bottom line is, you and I *can* choose compassion and peace over control and power. This is the Way of Jesus Christ; this is the path that leads us not into temptation, but into redemption, reconciliation and peace.