

Who Will You Listen To?

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Seeking: Honest Questions for Deeper Faith

Matthew 4:1-11 Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

⁷Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

¹¹Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Whose voices do we listen to? What voices do we allow to guide or influence us? Jesus didn't listen to the voice of the devil but answered the tempter's questions with scripture. When we listen to God's voice through the Word, God directs us away from temptations that can cause us spiritual harm. We stay focused on God's love.

Beloved of God, our seeking question for today is, "Who will you listen to?"

From the moment we arise in the morning, until the moment our minds finally come to full-stop for the night, our ears process endless sounds. We are listening. The choices for who and what gets our hearing attention are almost endless. Take a look at the screen and ponder for yourself...who do you chose to listen to? Whose voices or what voices have either earned your trust or commanded your attention over the years or just in recent days? Which ones do we allow to influence us?

The wind. The snow. Coffee dripping. TV shows. News outlets. Your doctor. The hiss of the radiator. Pitter patter of little feet. Your financial analyst.

In some moments these sounds simply become background noise like elevator music in stores. At other times, it is difficult if not impossible to stop the noises

growing like tinnitus in our ears. We choose to turn on the TV to hear the news. We choose to turn it off because we get angry at what we hear. We turn on the radio for the sound of other human voices. We don't want to turn it off because it means we crawl into bed alone. Our employer or colleagues tell us what we have to do. There are consequences if we don't listen.

When God created these two ears, only God could concoct the billions upon billions of sounds they would hear in our years of living on earth. Occasionally we don't have power over what we hear. Yet more often than not, we do. The question for today, is whose voices do we allow to shape our choices and lives?

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve have just experienced God's goodness and grace in giving them this amazing space of food and beauty. Then they allow the serpent's voice to grow louder and more important than God's voice. They listen to the serpent, are tempted and they make a choice to disobey God. That choice, began the ultimate journey of seeking for all of humanity. It thrust Adam and Eve out of the garden even as they were yet beloved by God.

For Jesus, He has just been baptized and God declares Him a beloved Son. God's Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness. After forty days and nights of fasting His body is physically weak. His human flesh is tired. Then the testing begins. The devil tempts Jesus to use His power in harmful ways.

As Rev. Shroyer writes in the Sanctified Art devotional, 'will He use His gifts as a parlor trick? Will He use His glory for fame or peace? Will He use his power for domination or justice?' (Seeking: Honest questions for deeper faith. Pg. 7)

All of us face similar temptations. The gifts and talents God has given us can either be used for good or ill. The power people assign us in our vocations or community organizations or even at church can become a force to help and heal or that power can be twisted into gaining more power.

Even as Jesus is physically and emotionally exhausted, He returns to what He already knows; the words that are on the hard drive of His heart and mind. All His life, Jesus has been listening to God. Now in this moment of testing, Jesus only has to draw upon the words that are already there. He turns away from all the blaring words of the devil. Shutting his eyes to focus, Jesus remembers the waters of His baptism. 'You are my beloved, Son.'

‘One doesn’t live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ Jesus says. ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test. Worship the Lord your God, and serve only Him.’ The devil flees!

Because Jesus knew who to listen to in His moment of testing, He had everything He needed.

Have you had the experience of listening to harmful advice, such as the devil was tempting Jesus with? It didn’t sound bad at the time, but as you listened more deeply, notes of discord arose in your spirit.

‘You have to be good all the time in order to make God love you.’

‘Men are more powerful and smarter than women.’

‘White people are better.’

‘It says it right there, in the Bible.’

‘If you don’t do everything I say, then you know what will happen.’

Words are powerful. Harmful theologies, lies, myths or other things trusted individuals have told us can absolutely cause harm. We believe our parents, our pastors, our teachers and confidants. If someone sounds credible and trustworthy, if we believe our source of information is reliable, then we give that voice power over other voices.

Listen to the way people are arguing over the history of our country. Hear the opinions of those disagreeing about medical care of pregnant women. Because culture’s truth is not absolute, we must listen critically to all the voices. Then we go back with Jesus to the wilderness. How are people using scripture? What endgame are people seeking and is it for their own power? Does the outcome of the argument produce love? Does it create a balm for goodness and light? Will it bring justice? Is there wisdom, or only knowledge?

Who we listen to and how we allow those voices to influence us is an essential question for our time. What Jesus encounter with the devil shows us is to remain centered on God’s voice and God’s love and the truths we find in scripture. Jesus knew He was loved by God. That fact grounded Him in the trial.

As we seek God, we can tune into God’s voice of love much like turning the radio dial to the correct station. Tuning out poisonous voices or unsafe voices asking for our allegiance is wise selective hearing. This is what our Lenten journey is all about. Stories in the scriptures of people seeking a deeper relationship with God

through their honest questions. It takes practice to learn to listen to the still, small voice of God. Take these forty days and choose who you want to listen to. Rest in God who continues to say over and over again, “I love you. I am here for you. I will tell you what to do.”

Like with a trusted lover or dear friend, when we are grounded as God’s beloved one, the chaotic voices begin to fade. There is new space for pursuing this Love which has always and will continue to pursue us. Close your eyes and remember your baptism. Focus your attention on the unconditional grace of God. Listen to His voice. Amen.