

holistic. Missional. CHRISTIAN. Community. Pt 3

September 8, 2013, we began a four week conversation dealing with what we hope will be the DNA of Missio Dei. There are four interwoven strands: Holistic, Missional, Christian, Community.

Here is a recap of Joe's talk on the third strand: CHRISTIAN.

“Truth, naked and cold, had been turned away from every door in the village. Her nakedness frightened the people. When Parable found her, she was huddled in a corner, shivering and hungry. Taking pity on her, Parable gathered her up and took her home. There, she dressed Truth in story, warmed her and sent her out again. Clothed in story, Truth knocked again at the villagers’ doors and was readily welcomed into people’s houses. They invited her to eat at their table and warm herself by their fire.”

Jewish teaching story

What does it mean to be Christian?

I think simply put: Followers of the way of Jesus.

I am the way the truth the life... Have we faulted on having the truth at the expense of the way or the life? Truth and life emerge out of the way...

It is a fundamental affirmation that Jesus’ way is the way to live. Now there are a hundred different ways that we could look at this. But this morning, I want to look at this by remembering the story of Jesus in the wilderness. There is something to who and how Jesus is in terribly adverse conditions. And I think that gives us a special glimpse into the way of Jesus. In times of great duress I think we get to glimpse something we normally don’t get to see...

So let’s do that: The three temptations of Christ...refers to the temptation of Jesus by the [devil](#) as detailed in each of the [Synoptic Gospels](#). (Read **Matthew 3:13-4:11, Mark 1:9-13, Luke 4:1-13**) Christian translations often use the term [Satan](#) (*accuser*) to describe Jesus' adversary in this narrative. The Scriptures actually say *diabolos* (Greek for *slanderer*) in the Gospels of Matthew and or Luke, though it does say *Satan* in the Gospel of Mark.

Observations:

1. The way of Jesus is not a 'natural way'. We will not follow it just by living as we have always lived. It takes strength of mind and will to live in a way contrary to what we alone will. (Garden of Gethsemane)
2. Prayerfully and scripturally attentive, Jesus deliberately chose the way he would live. If we choose to follow his way, we must be just as prayerful, scripturally attentive and deliberate.
3. These three scriptures we just read provide us with ways in which Jesus is the Way, and ways he is NOT.

The portion of the narrative that I want to focus on this morning emerges just after Jesus' baptism and focuses on the temptations in the wilderness.

But leading up to this the story we cannot ignore the Baptism of Jesus, the descent of the Spirit and the pronouncement "This is my son in whom I am well pleased". This is a glorious beginning to Jesus' career. A great start. The baptism, the descent of the dove-Spirit, the voice from heaven. Yes. Momentum is up. Jesus is on his way. And we who are ready to follow Jesus are also on his way.

And just then our story writers stop us in our tracks: "Hold on, not so fast. Don't be in such a hurry. Pay attention to this." We are eager to get going, but now we sit back—reluctantly, impatient with the interruption. We listen to the story of Jesus tempted in the desert. Why an interruption in the action, the logical progression of the story? Are the authors trying to tell us something?

Our attention is being brought upon the way that we are on. So, by saying that we are Christian, we believe that we are followers of the way of Jesus. Yet the gospel writers thought it important to highlight both what this way is, and what it is not.

So then, it is not just the what, but the how. Jesus was sent to begin the reconciliation of all things, but just how would he go about doing that? The same holds for us as agents of reconciliation having been sent by Christ—it

is not just what we do, but how we do it. The means ends up shaping the ends. The ways we go about being bearers and agents of reconciliation actually affects whether or not we accomplish those ends in a holistic way.

So, let's turn to the story that we have:

The first temptation: turn stones into bread. Jesus is hungry. The accuser wants to use Jesus to do good. Jesus can begin by providing himself with a good meal. He can turn the stuff of creation into a commodity and do something useful with it—an obvious and good thing to do. This will launch him into a career of doing good: meet people's needs; satisfy their hungers whether physical, emotional, or mental; fulfill them; give them self-esteem.

The accuser wants us to do the same: follow Jesus but then use Jesus to fulfill needs, first our own and then the needs of all the hungry people around us. It is the temptation to deal with myself and others first and foremost as consumers. It is the temptation to define life in consumer terms and then devise plans and programs to accomplish them "in Jesus name". Not that there are not legitimate needs. Not that there is not urgent work that needs doing. But the temptation is to *reduce* people, ourselves and others, to self-defined needs or culture-defined needs, which always, in the long run, end up being sin-defined needs—and use Jesus to do it. **The Jesus way is always engaged in, but never reduced to, meeting needs—especially our own.**

The second Temptation: jump off the roof of the temple: The accuser, the slanderer wants to use Jesus to dazzle the crowds of people on the street below with a miracle, to put a little excitement into their dull lives. "Jump, Jesus—these people will never forget it; it will change their lives. For years to come they will be telling their children and grandchildren of that angel-rescue, a convincing witness that God is supernaturally at their beck and call". What could be better than a career in God-miracles, religious miracles, entertaining crowds, supplying ecstasy on demand?

The accuser wants us to do the same thing. Use Jesus for his miracle potential. Use Jesus as a reprieve from the humdrum. Package Jesus as

a commodity for weekend diversions. The temptation is for us to reduce Jesus to escapism and thrills: an impersonal rescue, an irresponsible diversion, a manipulative reprieve from the ordinary. The Jesus way is not about diverting us from life, but in revealing the “more” that is in life beyond what we can cobble together on our own, dimensions of beauty and challenge, depths of gladness. What is more impressive than the miracles that Jesus performed is that he performed so few of them. He never used them as shortcuts or labor-saving devices. These occasional miracles were a way to show us the ‘more’ that is inherent in life, a revelation of the depth available to us in a life of love. **The way of Jesus is not a sequence of exceptions to the ordinary, but a way of living deeply and fully with the people here and now, in the place that we find ourselves.**

The Third Temptation: rule the world. The accuser wants to use Jesus to run the world, to take charge of the world. “All the kingdoms of the world and their splendor”. What an offer! Who is more qualified? Here is the opportunity to establish a rule of peace and justice and prosperity. Create a government free of corruption. But of course it would have to be on the accuser’s terms, a rule conditioned by the unholy—“if you will fall down and worship me”. This way would necessarily be an imposed, impersonal way. This way would be absolutely perfect in its functions, but with no personal relations.

And so we are also tempted to use Jesus in the same way—use Jesus to run our families, our neighborhoods, our schools, our governments as efficiently and properly as we can, but with no love or forgiveness. This is the only way you can have a just and peaceful anything—remove the imperfect person from it. If you let people have a say and engage these matters, suddenly you will find yourself operating in a whirlwind of prejudice, egotism, ambition, superstition, ignorance, greed, avarice—you name it. Our newspapers and newscasts do every day. Meanwhile the accuser is tempting us to impose the “right” by eliminating freedom. Gandhi used to talk disparagingly of “dreaming of systems so perfect that no one will need to be good.”

Jesus has a great deal to say about how we run the world—“kingdom” and “world” figure largely in what he was and is about. But he values us as a whole person too much to ‘de-soul’ us in order to make us good. He will not impose his way on any of us—not even one. He invites and forgives. He seeks the lost and heals the hurt. He rebukes the proud and turns the other cheek. The final word our Scriptures give us on Jesus is triumphant as the “ruler of the kings of the earth” (Rev 1:5)—the identical position offered by the accuser but ruling as it turns out first from the cross and now “seated at the Right hand of the Father” carrying out the grand and comprehensive work of salvation. Jesus was tempted to rule from a throne-bureaucracy of abstract rules and disembodied principles imposed on men and women apart from relational trust and worshiping love. He refused. And we are called to do the same as we recognize that the rule of Jesus is never impersonal, never nameless.

Again we notice that each of these temptations or tests has to do with the way that Jesus is the way, the way in which he will go about his work. Will he reduce and depersonalize the way by imposing his will on the rocks in order to take care of legitimate needs (first of all his own)? Will he put on a circus spectacular, demonstrating the miraculous power of God to the people on the street, but never dealing with them as persons? Will he rule the world by means of a faceless bureaucracy, efficiently enacting justice and prosperity without getting his hands dirty? Jesus said no to each temptation in turn. And why? Because in each case it would have been an impersonal way, a way abstracted from relationships, a way disengaged from love, a way imposed from the outside. It would have been a way ripped out of the comprehensive story of salvation, and therefore ripped out of participation in people’s lives. **The way of Jesus is always exercised in personal ways, creating and saving and blessing. It is never an impersonal interference from the outside.**

In each of the 3 temptations, Jesus refuses to do good things in the wrong way. Each temptation is wrapped around something good: feed people, evangelize by miracle, and rule the world justly. The accuser’s temptation strategy is to depersonalize the ways of Jesus but leave the way itself intact. But a way that is depersonalized, carried out without love or

intimacy or participation, is not, no matter how well we do it, no matter how much good is accomplished, the Jesus way. **The accuser is ultimately seeking to disincarnate.**

So, we seek to be Christian, a community following the Way of Jesus, incarnating the Love of God, here and now, at this time and in this city. Seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in discovering our next step in participation in the Mission of God.