

Living Your Story

Luke 4 Lent 1C (Temptation)

I was just finishing up my internship to become an ordained minister when I received a call to my first parish at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Strum, Wisconsin. I had finished my studies, knew how to translate Greek backwards and forwards, learned the theology of our church, and I was prepared. I even had my first sermon for my people done way ahead of time, really excited to share my gifts with the people of Strum and show that I had knowledge of scripture and of preaching.

At least, I felt prepared. I was ready for the call and even felt just a bit important for a few minutes when bam! I was struck with a horrible virus that took my voice from me. The laryngitis was so bad that at my very first worship service at Immanuel, my sermon had to be read by a lay person. And, when time came to sing the liturgy, I couldn't do it. I had to speak it and I could barely choke out the words. I was humbled and

had to accept the understanding and love of a congregation who did not yet know me. On that very first day of ministry, I had to release my ego and my eagerness to start off the pastorate with a big bang. That was not to be.

And yet, it was a perfect beginning. As it may be easy for anyone in any position in life, we often can lose our story, the reasons for why we choose to go a certain way. We can lose our purpose, tempted along the way, into thinking that we, not God, are the primary focus of every story including mine. That day, I lost my voice.

God didn't give me a virus to make that happen, as viruses just happen because they are viruses. That's what viruses do, but what God did do within that situation, was send the Spirit to remind me that the ministry to which I was called was not my voice at all, and was not about me and my gifts, but rather about what God was doing with my voice and gifts. I had lost track of my place in the story.

It's always important to remember who you are. And, we best remember who we are by the stories of ourselves, the stories that make us who we are. There is a story that belongs to you and one that belongs to me. In my story:

- I am a daughter of a full blooded German mother and a mixture of Dutch and English on my Father's side.
- I am one of four daughters, one of them being a twin sister, Carol, who has an adorable son living with autism.
- I am the wife of Jim, a professor of Chemistry and Environmental studies, who has been my life companion for 25 years.
- I love to sing, have two degrees in music and sing with the Schola Cantorum of Eau Claire.
- I am a lover of mystery novels and science fiction movies, and I love every novel Jane Austin ever wrote.
- I love to see God's amazing creation through my camera lens and spend time with my dog Luna.

- I am a pastor, an ordained minister of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, called by St. John's Lutheran Church of the Norwest Synod of Wisconsin
- I am a child of God.

It's important to remember my story because it reminds me where I've come from and who I am; it provides grounding and balance to my life.

The stories of the Old Testament people the Hebrews or the Israelites, their stories brought balance to them, too. Moses was the prophet who believed that they should remember who they were as a people, remembering where they had been, and how they came to the land that was promised to them. So, when those Hebrew people offered their gifts to God, Moses told them to remember who they were:

"You shall make this response before the Lord your God: A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and

lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous.”

Their story was a community story, a story that directed their thanksgivings and offerings into a framework that provided purpose and meaning to their lives together. And, if you read scripture, you can see that they told that story over and over and over so that they would never forget where they came from and who they were.

If you don't have a story, you cannot remember who you are, can you?

Then, in the story about Jesus wandering the wilderness with the devil, the temptation for Jesus there is that he will forget his story, who he really is. All of the devil's questions have the same challenge: to make Jesus forget who he is and what he is to do. And, what real temptations face him, too! For, temptations are never ever really sinister in nature, at least not most of the time.

Real temptations are alluring and can seem like good things. Think of all the good Jesus could do if he just followed the Devil's advice:

- If there is hunger, why not feed himself? In fact, why not feed all who are hungry? The Devil is offering him a way to end world hunger!
- Why not assume power over all the authorities and governments in the world? Wouldn't it be a good thing if Jesus were to stop war and strife forever?
- Why not jump off a precipice to show he really is God? Wouldn't that finally show to the world that he is who he says he is? Then no one would ever doubt him!

Yes, the real temptations in life are ones that seem good. In fact, if Jesus had only taken up the Devil on his offers, how good it would have been for us, right?

But then Jesus declares the importance of his story when quoting that story found in scripture: “One does not live by bread alone.”

“Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.” “Do not put the Lord God to the test.” Jesus reminds us who he is, God’s beloved Son.

So, what about your story? What about your wilderness? Wildernesses are places where it is easy to forget about God and ultimately about who you are; that is, God’s child.

Temptations come along that seem so good, but really only puff us up, put us before others, and ultimately cause a great deal of grief. Just pick something that seems so good and note how it can be an attractive temptation.

Without a story to keep you balanced, you will forget who you are. And, if you forget who you are, the evil lurking around you and really take you for everything.

Three times, Jesus had to remember the story, the words of God that defined who he is, which we find in scripture. And, each time we are tempted, especially by something good that ultimately can become bad for us, we must remember our

story, the story of who we are – children of God.

This story of God, which is our story, tells us that:

- We are loved by God
- We are people of peace
- We are people who love the neighbor
- We are people who are forgiven
- We are people who witness to this story

At the end of the Gospel story today, we hear that the Devil went away “until an opportune time.” That really could mean for all of us at an opportune time, when we forget who and whose we are, that is the opportune time. It’s important at times such as those to remember who you are. You are God’s child and are to remember that. For, only when you know your story can you truly tell the Devil just where he can go.