

Who Will You Listen To?

Matthew 4:1-11

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

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Over recent years many charts have been published giving a quick visual image about where news sources fall on a spectrum of liberal to conservative. For some folks this has been seen as a tool to check where their own news sources fall and evaluate if that is what they want to be consuming. For some it has been a measure by which they choose their news, in an effort to make sure that the information they are receiving all comes from one position. For some it has been a way to diversify their news intake, to hear different perspectives and know what others are saying. For all who have used this tool, it helps answer the question, "Who will you listen to?"

But that question goes well beyond where we get our news. It is, in fact, a central question to the choices we make about how we live and who we understand ourselves to be.

The same was true for Jesus.

Here we find Jesus in the wilderness...coming off of his baptism by John in the Jordan, an occasion on which Matthew tells us that when he came out of the water a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17, NRSV).

But the reality is that for Jesus, as for us, that is not the only voice at work. Rather we are told that Jesus was accompanied by the Spirit into the wilderness where, after 40 days of fasting, he was tempted.

And, if you've been around the church for very long, you've heard this passage before. It shows up every year on the first Sunday in Lent. In it Jesus is challenged to make some choices.

If you are hungry (and of course he was hungry after fasting so long)...if you are hungry...turn these stones into bread...after all, you have the power.

If you believe God will really protect you, jump from this high place...after all, doesn't God love you?

If you want to make a difference, what you really need is power and I can give you power over all the kingdoms of the world...what would you be willing to do to receive that?

These are the questions...the temptations that Jesus faced.

And it seems that the central question for Jesus is one of identity.

We go straight from his baptism - a moment of him choosing God and God choosing him - and then on to the temptations where he has to face decisions about who he will be and how he will live, decisions about who to trust and who to listen to.

And these questions aren't unique to this story. Just a few weeks ago we read that passage from Deuteronomy, near the end of Moses' life, when Moses reminded the people that they had choices to make about choosing life or death, about choosing God's ways or the ways of the world...ultimately questions about who they would listen to.

So, here is Jesus. Barely dry from baptism, anticipating the ministry he will do, and he comes face to face with questions about the choices he will make and the identity he will choose.

And, while we often read through this story as if the answers came easy, we must remember the temptations were real. And, if we are honest, we can see some benefits that would have come to his giving in to them.

Not only would Jesus have been able to abate his own hunger, but if he would turn stones into bread think of all the people he could feed.

Not only would Jesus have power if he controlled all the kingdoms, but he would be able to make quick changes to broken systems.

The reality is that there are ways that we can see the benefits to following the voice of the tempter.

These decisions are not as clear as we sometimes like to pretend. Rather he had to choose who to listen to.

Should he listen to the voice with the quick fix that tames the hunger but doesn't address the systems of injustice and poverty that caused the hunger in the first place?

Should he listen to the voice that reminds him about how he can exercise power even when doing so means working outside of community, outside of relationships, not changing hearts but simply changing rules?

We like to read this and act as if there is one clear answer, one easy answer. But the reality is that each answer required a decision, a choice, about whose voice carried more power, who was allowed to speak to his heart and his mind. And that is our challenge as well.

Who will we listen to?

Will we listen to the voice of God who not only calls Jesus beloved, but calls us beloved as well? Or will we listen to those who say we are not enough?

Will we listen to the voice of God who invites us to think of others and not just ourselves, to shape our lives and make our choices based on the good of the whole rather than our self-centered desires? Or will we listen to those who say that we have to look out for number one?

Will we listen to the voice of God who calls us again and again into relationship with God, with people, with creation? Or will we listen to the voices that draw us into division and discord?

And sometimes the choices aren't even that big. Sometimes it is simply a choice about the background music that plays in our lives...the news we consume, the music we hear, the videos on our phones, the voices from the past...all which help to shape us in the ways we allow.

In a poem written for our Lenten devotional booklet, Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed writes this:

“Twitter or the BBC / the ads on late-night television / the wind as she blows / the echo of children playing / the quiet of snow / the ice bucket challenge / the phone when it rings / your pastor / your mother / your doctor / your gut / the tension in your shoulders / the restaurant singing happy birthday / audio books / TED talks / the rhythm of the music / the coffee drip in the morning / your therapist / the wisdom of the enneagram / the way your heart comes alive when you're being creative / the man on the corner asking for change / the kid on the subway selling chocolate / the labels on the makeup bottle that promise timeless beauty / the magazines that tell you you need timeless beauty / astrology / the Dow Jones / the hiss of the radiator / the pitter patter of little feet / financial advisors / the top 40 pop / the top 40 country / the *New York Times* / the rumor mill / the Book of Psalms / your sense of self / Jesus, when he says, “I am with you, always.”

Friends, there are so many voices to listen to. There are so many choices about what we consume. There are so many ways that we are available to be shaped.

As we enter this season of Lent, we are given the gift of time, the gift of the discipline of quiet, the gift of choice. As we enter this season of Lent, we are given the opportunity once again to choose who we will listen to and by listening who we will become.

As we close I want you to hear some of the lyrics from Lauren Daigle's song *You Say I Am Loved*.

“I keep fighting voices in my mind that say I'm not enough  
Every single lie that tells me I will never measure up  
Am I more than just the sum of every high and every low  
Remind me once again just who I am because I need to know

“You say I am loved when I can't feel a thing  
You say I am strong when I think I am weak  
And you say I am held when I am falling short  
And when I don't belong, oh You say I am Yours

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And I believe  
Oh, I believe  
What You say of me  
I believe”

Friends, who will you listen to? And by listening, who will you become?