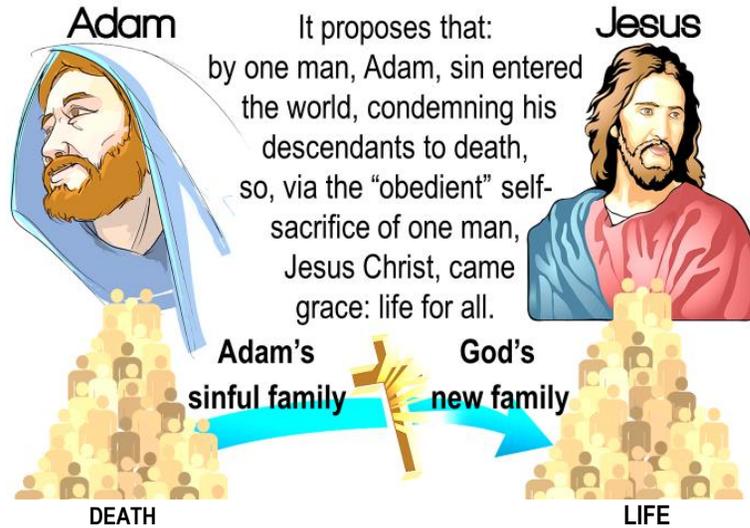


“Encounter in the Desert”

Lent 1 – Sunday March 5, 2017

I paraphrased the Lectionary Epistle (Rm 5:12-21) into only a few short lines in the “Call to Worship,” because I have a lot of difficulty with its Theology.



Later, early in the 2nd century, the Church Fathers become even more “pointed” in their accusations, in that it justified silencing their women (1 Tm 2:14).

“It was not Adam, but the woman, Eve, who was led astray... and fell into sin.”

So then, what of Jesus’ resisting temptation by the devil?
Is this in reference to the obedience of which Paul wrote?
Is he even aware of this story? Where does it come from?

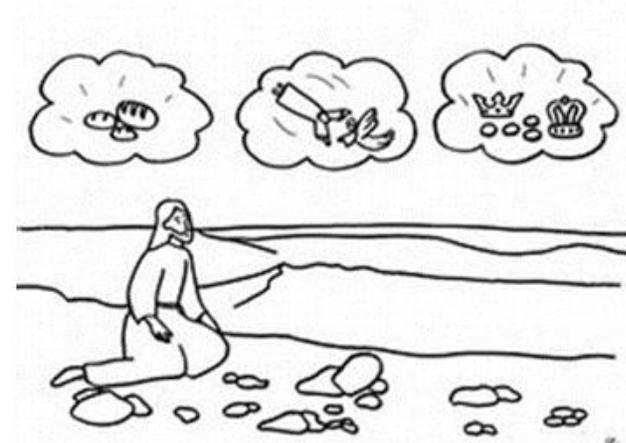
I’m quite certain Paul and Mark knew each other, but Mark gives no details of the temptation event.

After Jesus’ baptism, Mark has only these two sentences:

“At once, the Spirit drove him into the desert where he stayed for forty days, and was put to the test by Satan. He was with the wild animals & angels cared for him.”

From where do Matthew and Luke get the expansion of these two sentences into a full-fledged threesome of very specific vignettes between Jesus and Satan?

I believe it comes from realities Christian communities faced later in the 1st century CE, realities of persecution.



The struggle to earn one’s daily bread in a world that was beginning to treat Christians as outcasts was becoming increasingly more difficult for them.

Hence, *“Humanity does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God,”* became one of the community’s mantras.

2) Temple Judaism & its establishment mentality were becoming major opponents of Christianity; they had even incorporated a curse against them into their Synagogue Liturgy, beginning in 85CE.

To confront this insult openly would be seen as a way of, *“Putting God’s protection to the test.”*

Late 1st cy Christianity had increasingly become a secret society - with a year of preparation before you were even let in.

Public displays of bravado, ie., jumping from Temple Parapets, would be strongly discouraged.

Which leads right into the 3rd temptation for Christianity to leave the margins, and to aspire to becoming the centre of power, (which by the way did happen in the 6th cy; and has remained so in the western world ‘til only a little more than a generation ago.)

“The Lord your God is the one to whom you must do homage,” Jesus responds, *“and He is the only One you must serve.”*

The expanded Temptation Story affirmed how Jesus walked with them in the whys & why nots of their time.

Just as true for us in the difficult issues of our era.

1) World economies are all driven by “The Bottom Line.” Food prices are too low to encourage increased supply, so the poorest people of the world are still going hungry.

Jesus’ injunction to Peter... his commission to, *“Feed my sheep, tend my lambs, care for them,”*

has been seen as the call to preach to them, more often than nurturing economic reform that would encourage more food production.

Simple handouts, turning stones into bread, is a stop gap solution that changes nothing. The world needs living bread, not handouts.

2) The Church, as having the key to the heavenly portals, has become an anachronism... irrelevant in the 21st cy, and no amount of theatrics is ever going to change that.

Intelligent people won’t respond to threats of hell nor promises of eternal bliss, a harp for everyone.

“Such talk is blasphemous...” says Jesus; *and tantamount to putting God to the test.”*

3) And finally... worshiping the idol of more & more stuff, no longer seen to be detrimental to Christian integrity, will, I believe, be the death knell of mainline churches.



This is not easy. Lent is not an easy time. But we don’t engage it alone. As for Jesus, God’s Spirit accompanies us in the desert, stays with us there, and feeds us always, With God all things are possible... Amen.

