

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the First Sunday in Lent



Year C
RCL

Deuteronomy 26:1-11
Luke 4:1-13
Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

The Collect

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, “Today I declare to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us.” When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, 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. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me.” You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God. Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house.

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

Qui habitat

- 1 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, *
abides under the shadow of the Almighty.
- 2 He shall say to the LORD,
“You are my refuge and my stronghold, *
my God in whom I put my trust.”
- 9 Because you have made the LORD your refuge, *
and the Most High your habitation,
- 10 There shall no evil happen to you, *
neither shall any plague come near your dwelling.
- 11 For he shall give his angels charge over you, *
to keep you in all your ways.
- 12 They shall bear you in their hands, *
lest you dash your foot against a stone.
- 13 You shall tread upon the lion and adder; *
you shall trample the young lion and the serpent
under your feet.
- 14 Because he is bound to me in love,
therefore will I deliver him; *
I will protect him, because he knows my Name.

15 He shall call upon me, and I will answer him; *
I am with him in trouble;
I will rescue him and bring him to honor.

16 With long life will I satisfy him, *
and show him my salvation.

Luke 4:1-13

After his baptism, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God,

and serve only him.’”

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written,

‘He will command his angels concerning you,
to protect you,’

and

‘On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a
stone.’”

Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

SERMON

You may have noticed that over the past year or so, I have been sneaking little messages into my sermons – messages which speak of a more comprehensive obligation associated with the title “Christian”. I’m a naughty boy, I am. Last week, I got a little more up-front with it when I quoted theologian N. T. Wright’s disturbing words:

Much nineteenth- and twentieth-century Christian thought has accepted the framework offered by the Enlightenment, in which the Christian faith has the role of rescuing people from the evil world, ensuring them forgiveness in the present and heaven hereafter.

Well, that was certainly the message I took from First Presbyterian and First Christian when I was a child. From those saints I learned that God’s world is a simple sort of place with but one major rule – good people go

to heaven and bad people, well, they don't, so it's in your best interest to not fidget in the pews and no matter how bored you are in confirmation class don't play with the cap gun in your pocket, PARTICULARLY if there are caps in it. This teaching has the advantage of being simple and easy to understand, built as it is on foundations of self-interest, something we all understand. It's greatest weakness is that it leaves no room for love of others except as a means to an end. It is like telling a new mother that she will be assigned a recording angel who will take down all her mistakes so she better love her baby or she'll get it good in the end. No mother I ever met had to be threatened to love her baby. I don't doubt that there are conflicted and damaged mothers out there. I just haven't met any of them, and until I do, my conviction is certain. Taking on the title "Christian", like becoming a mother, must not be under-

taken in answer to the question, “What’s in it for me?” Living as a Christian in God’s Creation should be the impetus for endless gratitude. The land and our life within it, like a baby, are miraculous gifts of God which, by appearing so ordinary, come to be overlooked. We fail to direct our attention fully to the miracle unfolding right before us. We have embraced the idea that the land which feeds us, the air which we breathe and the water we drink, all gifts of God, are evil and our best course is to get out of it with as many goody points as we can collect, just as N. T. Wright warned us. Our Jewish brethren are wiser than that. They treat God’s Creation as a gift and respond in gratitude.

In our passage from Deuteronomy, the farmers of Israel were directed to take the first fruits of their harvest to the Lord on a holiday called Shavuot to acknowledge

their gratitude for the harvest which had come, as a gift, into their hands. Deuteronomy established a ceremony for offering these first fruits.

when you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, “Today I declare to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us.”

“When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance...” The land and its bounty are a gift of God to His people and First Fruits, the time of Shavuot, is founded upon acknowledging that indisputable fact with gratitude.

Being grateful, though, is hollow unless we also acknowledge Him to whom we owe that debt of gratitude. At Shavuot, Jews are to recite the story of God leading them from Egypt to the land He gave to them, the very land which produced the harvest.

When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, 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. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD,

have given me.”

None of the nonsense about the “evils of the world” which consumes so much of our discourse today, leading us to lives of fear and anxiety and urging us to take up sides to man the ramparts against the invading evil of the world. Shavuot is a celebration of gratitude for the goodness of the earth and gratitude to God for its gift to us. Yes, there is evil in the world. There is now and there was then, but we are to live in gratitude, not in fear; in trust, not in anxiety.

Not so easy, given the 24 hour news cycle. All day long, we’re buried in an avalanche of stories of terrifying evil. It’s no wonder we’re scared and consumed with finding safety. Two stories, in particular, caught my attention this week. The first, from West Virginia, is the controversy over legislation which would permit people to carry concealed weapons on college cam-

puses, no matter what the college or the student body thinks about that. What could possibly go wrong? The second story, from Indiana, answers that question most completely. A man whose pistol started to slip out of his belt tried to steady it and instead discharged it, shooting himself in the genitals.

We are not being taught the proper gratitude to God for His many blessings. We are being taught to fear those not like us. We are being taught that the ways of our tribe are the only acceptable ways. I heard a story once of a man in line in a grocery store. The woman behind him was speaking on her cell phone in a language he couldn't understand. He took it to be Spanish and told her, "This is America. We speak English. If you want to talk that way, go back to Mexico."

She replied, "Sir, I was speaking Navajo. If you want to speak English, go back to England."

From sunup to sunup the news channels on cable recount acts of hatred and murder, cruelty and heartlessness. On the international stage, we are shown cruel acts of people who don't look like us or speak like us and we are taught to fear and hate them, even though the statistics clearly demonstrate that we are at much greater peril from native-born people. I think of an Interstate highway on which uncounted thousands of people obey the laws, give way to the rights of others, moderate their speed and behavior for the benefit of all, but only the traffic wrecks get coverage on the news, leaving everyone to think of the Interstate highway system as a place only of death and carnage.

Simultaneously, all over the Tri-state, people are paying for the lunch of the car behind them because they remember Cody Gollihue (a young man they likely never met) and his father's #RACK movement. Nobody

covers that. Would it not be better to live in gratitude for the gifts of God?

Yes, it would, and that is the lesson of Shavuot.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

"Death is what takes place within us when we look upon others not as gift, blessing, or stimulus but as threat, danger, competition"¹ Live in gratitude, church. Live in gratitude for the gift of others.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

The Bible texts of the Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel lessons are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Church of Christ in the USA, and used by permission.

The Collects, Psalms and Canticles are from the Book of Common Prayer, 1979.

Sermon Copyright 2018 J. Stewart Schneider

¹ Dorothee Solle

