

They say the devil is in the details. This morning's text is not about red devils, or blue devils, or pink devils, or any devils at all for that matter. It's a story about devilish details.

This world tells us what it thinks we are supposed to be. This world assigns each and everyone one of us the roles, feelings, and responsibilities it believes we should live into. Too often, the world projects onto us what it wants us to be rather than reflecting AND accepting AND loving us as we really are.

If you think the world has outdated expectations of what constitutes proper young ladies and gentlemen (that very phrase is limited and archaic in its own right), you wouldn't believe its rigid and outdated expectations for Messiah.

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, enters a lengthy time of discernment and fasting. Jesus knows that God is calling him to sacred and unprecedented things. But Jesus also knows the world isn't all that interested in the sacred and unprecedented – the world would like its divine revelations and God expressions in predictable and bite-sized pieces, thank you very much.

During this Lenten season, we are considering how we might empty our own buckets of forced and ill-fitting expectations and refill them with roles, feelings, and responsibilities that more authentically align with our hearts, minds, and spirits. I don't think it's a stretch to believe that Jesus is doing the same.

Sharon Ringe notes that first-century expectations of the divine were as follows: the anointed one would return in the vein of a prophet like Moses, or a dynamic political leader like David, or a righteous and wise

priest like Elijah. Furthermore, the anointed one would restore the glory of the past.

The devil that Jesus confronts is this: Can the me, who I am right now, become the me that I am called to be?

Jesus ponders aloud:

Is my God-connection something to be proven? There are plenty of hungry people in this world, and Rome's oppressive systems don't intend to eliminate food deserts anytime soon. Is the me that is God's me one that uses a magic wand and transforms river rocks into loaves of rye bread? I suppose I could conjure up an entire bakery if I wanted to. But I am not sure I see the point. For life is a whole lot more than eating bread. Is life not also the sharing of bread in community? Is life not also the creating of spaces for people to knead their own dough, and bake their own bread, and share it, too? And yes, Moses conjured up bread in the wilderness, but in his case, the conjuring was rooted in survival and subsistence.

Jesus continues his internal conversation:

What kind of power might my calling afford in Caesar's world? It seems I could pull the strings of every important nation – they'd know my name as they knew David's and Solomon's. Perhaps they'd even build me a mighty tower? The only thing I'd have to do is worship systems. I'd just have to tell myself the little lie that what is socially constructed is the truth, and what is divine and lasting is the façade. But something's strange. It seems my heart is

most full when I acknowledge the source of my being, and I see God's Oneness in the faces of my neighbors.

The discernment continues:

What kind of power might demonstrate my special relationship with God? Elijah had all kinds of cool parlor tricks. He could make blazing bonfires from rain-soaked pyres; he could multiply bread; he could bring life to valleys of dry bones. Surely a cliff-dive and some mild levitation would set my mind at ease, let me, and others, too, know for sure that God is present. And I could abide in the Temple, and God would be there, too, and we'd all be safe and sound. But the ancient texts remind me that God isn't something to be tested. God doesn't play games of chicken. God doesn't need the extraordinary nor the formal to be present. God is with us in the simplicity of life.

The beauty of today's text, and I think the hope of it, too, is that Jesus is resolved to be Jesus.

Yes, he'll share characteristics of prophets, political leaders, and priests, but he'll express those characteristics in a decidedly Jesus way. Jesus makes the law and God of Moses significantly more accessible and compassionate. Torah isn't a set of directives, it's a lifestyle for loving God and neighbor. Theophany isn't dangerous and explosive, it's healing, and cathartic, and transformative.

Jesus has the charisma of David, but he's steeped in servant leadership. His isn't so much a kingdom as it is a kin-ship, and it's not actually, his, it's God. And Jesus invites everyone to experience this kin-ship.

Jesus is steeped in the ways of the righteous. But Jesus does not center his living around a temple and its ordinances and traditions. Jesus centers his life around God, and his temple is faithful community; sometimes it has shape and sometimes it doesn't.

All of this is to say that the world was waiting for Mos-E-lij-a-David to bring redemption. Instead, the world got an itinerant preacher from a no-name region, the son of a carpenter, and a refugee to boot. He didn't carry a sword; he didn't wear a long robe; he didn't preach from high places; he didn't sit in places of honor. His best friends, perhaps his only friends, were mangy fishers, and tax collectors, and outcasts, and vilified women. Somedays he felt sad, and lonely, and scared, and overwhelmed. Other days, he felt happy, and loved, and connected, and confident, and at peace. He focused the whole of his activity on loving God and neighbor, the rest was secondary at best.

Jesus wasn't at all what the world thought he was supposed to be. But don't you ever doubt for one second that Jesus was everything God created him to be.

Good friends, our journey to the cross involves a fork in the road: where the world thinks we ought to go and where God knows we can go. Jesus chose the road less traveled, and it has made all the difference. May God give us the strength to follow the same route when our own paths diverge.

Amen.