

John Sampson
"Consenting Adults"
Text: Luke 4:1 - 13
Preached at KVCC
March 10, 2019

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer.

Amen.

Today is the first Sunday in our journey of Lent, the journey in which we accompany Jesus during the last days of his ministry, as he slowly, but surely, moves towards Jerusalem, and towards the end of his life.

This journey with Jesus to Jerusalem is a journey that will take us not just through the shadowy episodes of our sacred story, but will

also take us deep within our hearts, and ask us to look in places that we'd rather not look. It will ask us questions about ourselves that we might like to avoid.

- The season of Lent will ask us if we really do love our neighbors as ourselves.
- It will ask us if the value of human life is really of ultimate value in our lives, and in our world.
- It will ask us if we are willing to follow Jesus' message of compassion wherever it leads.
- It will ask us what we are willing to sacrifice in the name of love.

Because the journey of Lent is all about Jesus, and the journey of Lent is all about us, and about what we value, and about who we believe we are, and about who we really are when push comes to shove.

This question of who we really are is the question that Thomas Keating asks in our first reading, and it is the question at the root of the story of Jesus being tempted.

And the way we answer this question is going to make all of the difference as we move through Lent, as the space around Jesus tightens, and as the plans for his destruction get put into place, and as he arrives in Jerusalem. The way we answer this question today is going to make all of the difference as we move through our lives, as our world dies around us, as our nation becomes more divided, and as more people flee from their homes in search of safety and a better life for their families.

Who do we like to think we are, and who are we really?

Thomas Keating, who is the godfather of the Centering Prayer movement, a form of prayer that leads to the releasing of our egos to allow God's presence to be active in our lives, tells us that many of us live with a false sense of self. That we are alienated from the sacred ground that is the truth of our being. That we are alienated from the centers of love and compassion at the root of our humanity. And Jesus shows us what this false self looks like. It looks like the self putting its satiation first; it looks like the self putting its power and glory first; it looks like the self putting its security first. It looks like the self forgetting God's dream for all of her children.

And it is the outworking of the false self that powers the entire journey of Lent that we have just begun. Because Lent is a master course in looking at what the false self is, how it works, and the

implications of allowing it to be active in our lives and in our communities.

- When the false self wants to control a community it rigs an election.
- When the false self wants its pleasure more than anything else the earth is raped instead of being celebrated.
- When the false self chooses its security over the wellbeing of others Peter denies Jesus.
- When the false self fears the loss of its power the cross is erected on Golgotha.

Yes, the story of Lent, which we are just beginning, does take us into the darkest recesses of our hearts. But our story doesn't need to end

in darkness. Because as a people of faith we believe that the false self does not have to have ultimate power. We believe it doesn't have to have the final say in our lives, that it doesn't have to have the last word in what the future will be.

Right here, right at the beginning of Lent, both Keating and Jesus show us how the path to Jerusalem, the path of the false self's activity, is not necessary. The cross can be avoided. The Passion of Jesus can be bypassed. The hurt we do to one another, and our world, can be lessened.

All it takes is for us to become consenting adults.

All it takes is for us to consent to opening a space within our hearts for the Spirit of God to find a home and become active in our lives.

All it takes is for us to consent to changing the destination of our journey from Jerusalem, the place where our false selves have free reign and nothing is sacred, to a movement back to where we will live in the presence of the Holy. We might call this place Eden. We might call this place the kin-dom. We might call this place Easter.

Whatever we call the place that rejects the shadows of Lent in favor of the light of Presence it will be neither straightforward, nor easy to get to.

It will be the work of a lifetime. And it will require an ongoing discipline to reduce the power of our egos, of our self centered needs and wants that dictate how we behave in our interactions with each other, how we vote, how we make decisions on how and what we consume, how we decide what the priorities of our lives will be.

But how do we change the path we are journeying down? How do we change the destination of our lives? How do we detach from our false selves? How do we resist the seeming inevitability of the cross?

We fast.

Or we follow a regimen of contemplative prayer.

Or we commit ourselves to serving others.

Or we bring mindfulness into our daily routines.

Or we follow any number of the other sacred disciplines.

Because there are many spiritual technologies that are open to us that have been developed and refined over centuries, both within

our Christian tradition, and in other sacred traditions, that have their dual goal as reducing the power of our false selves, while simultaneously making us more aware of God's presence in our lives.

By beginning to follow one of the many disciplines, by keeping at it, by failing and then trying again, by sharing with each when we find it rough to keep going, and when things have gotten easier, we are consenting to changing our hearts. We're consenting to letting God in, and letting her work her magic in us.

Jesus fasts, and it is in his hunger, not in his fullness, that he is able to let go of the temptation for his personal power and glory.

Jesus fasts, and it is with his stomach grumbling and in his light-headedness, not in having just eaten at a five star restaurant, that he puts God's dream for her children above his own safety.

Our tradition is showing us through fasting, but really through any of the spiritual disciplines, a way to move beyond the inertia of our false selves, beyond the givenness of our brokenness, beyond the inevitability of the cross.

Will we be consenting adults?

Will we consent to taking on a discipline that puts personal humility right in the center of our spiritual journey, right in the center of our lives?

A number of weeks ago I decided I wanted to fast during Lent as a way to put myself under a spiritual microscope and begin to do some of the hard work of unraveling the power of my false self in a new way, a way I wasn't currently using.

I wanted to make Lent not simply a journey of tears and shadows, but make it a time of spiritual renewal and exploration. And I wanted to share this experience with you. I think one of the greatest gifts of being in a faith community is the way you can share your sacred journey with others.

So, I put it out there. I invited you to join me, without having any idea if anyone would accept my invitation. And I am so thankful that many of you said yes.

I'm thankful for many of you agreeing to join together to explore the discipline of fasting, not out of obligation, not out of a sense of blindly following a tradition, but out of genuine excitement and hope for what fasting, in all of the ways we've chosen to define the term, could bring to our lives and our sense of relationship with God.

I'm excited to see what those of us who have decided to fast will discover about ourselves, and what we will discover about the path of selflessness.

But fasting is not just for those who fast. If you have decided not to join the group that is fasting, for whatever reason, I hope that you will find the stories and experiences of those who are fasting, which will be shared in our worship over the next several weeks, to be encouraging to you in your own spiritual path.

Yes, we do travel with Jesus down a difficult road. But he has shown us that our paths need not end in Jerusalem, that our journeys and the journey of our world need not end at the foot of the cross. He shows us at the very opening of our season of Lent how the ending of the story before us hasn't yet been written.

It can be changed into something beautiful if we are willing to become consenting adults.

Amen.