

WORSHIPING TOGETHER SERMON

First Sunday of Lent – March 10, 2019

The TriCon Players:

Scripture Reader – Sarah Campanello

Scenario 1: Ainsley Siefer, Matthew Crowell, Isabel Crowell, and Cole Siefer

Scenario 2: Russ Campanello, Betsy Swaim, and Earl Van Horn

Scenario 3: The Flynn-Crowell family, The Siefer Family, and Judy Walpole

Ministers: Bob Brown and Jean Vandergrift

Sermon Flow and Script

At the end of the Mission and Ministry segment, Bob will call the children forward. Jean and Bob, plus all the youth and adult players will already be seated on the front pews, ready for action.

The Liturgist comes to the pulpit to make the segue with a very brief intro.

Liturgist, Blaise Siefer:

Let us turn our attention to the reading of scripture.

After his baptism, when Jesus was aware of his identity as the Son of God and full of the Spirit, he was led away from all of these people into a quiet, wild place, on a kind of spiritual quest. Let's listen to what happened.

Sarah Campanello: (from the lectern down front)

Luke 4:1-15

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness,² 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.³ The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.'⁴ Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone."⁵ Then the devil* led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.⁶ 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.⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.'⁸ Jesus answered him, 'It is written,

"Worship the Lord your God,

and serve only him."⁹ 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,¹⁰ for it is written,

"He will command his angels concerning you,

to protect you",

¹¹and

"On their hands they will bear you up,

so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."¹²

¹²Jesus answered him, 'It is said, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."¹³ When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

14 Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

***Hymn # 329 (Dove) “Break Thou the Bread of Life”**

Introduction - Jean

Today we want to learn from the story of Jesus **when he was in the wilderness and faced temptation**. Now, I just used two big words that I will say more about:

“Wilderness” – to *us* this might mean a forest with lots of trees; where *Jesus* lived, it would have been more like a desert with other kinds of plants. But in both cases, it means **a quiet, wild place where he could be by himself and think**.

He was there for forty days. Do you know how long that is? Like one month – March, for instance, *plus* nine more days. So he was hungry, weak, and getting a little confused about right and wrong. This is what we mean by **“temptation.”**

Well, Jesus wanted to do what was right, especially in the work that God had given him to do – his **“ministry.”** *We* want to do what is good, right and true too. But it isn’t always easy to figure out, as you know.

When he was in this wilderness, Jesus heard a **voice in his head** telling him to misuse his power and do what God would *not* approve of. He called this voice the “Devil” or “Satan” – **“against God.”** This evil voice told him to bow down and worship *him* instead of God in order to get people to do whatever the Devil wanted – sometimes even pretending to be good!

But the way that Jesus figured out what was right and the way that he followed *God’s* voice was to turn to the Bible, to pray, and to listen. This way he became clearer in his thinking, stronger, and braver – ready to do ministry!

You and I face difficult situations too – feel like we are in a wilderness of right and wrong. So today people in the church are going to show us three situations in which people are having a hard time knowing the right thing to do. These are made up – pretend examples. But you will all get to decide what is the right thing to do.

Scenario 1

Ainsley Siefer comes forward and stands front and center. She carries the sign with the question mark side showing.

Jean: Ainsley has been invited to a party. Betty, a girl who is new at school is throwing this party and has invited several kids from her class. Ainsley doesn’t know Betty well at all, and other kids have whispered that this new student is a little weird. They say that she talks funny; she has a limp. What should Ainsley do?

(Piano side) Matthew comes forward with Isabel and both of them stand next to Ainsley, both on the same side of her.

Matthew: Ainsley, you’ve got plenty of friends. You don’t need any more.

Isabel: Besides, Betty is not cool. No one else that you know is going to go to this party. You won't have fun either.

Big brother, Cole, comes forward (Parish Hall side) and stands on the other side of Ainsley.

Cole: That's not true, Ainsley! You can't have too many friends. You may make a new one in Betty. Everybody has something different about them; you do too...
If *you* go to the party, I bet others will. Plus, *you* may forget the party, but she never will. It will make a big difference to her.

Bob: *Bob stands up front and talks to Ainsley (one side or another).*

Yes. It's hard to be new, in a new place! By accepting this invitation, you can help this new person feel at home and welcome. I remember what Jesus said: "Do good unto others – the good you hope they would do to you." (Matthew 7:12, Luke 6:31)

Jean: Congregation, it's your turn. What do you think is the right thing to do? Please raise your hands to vote. Should Ainsley ignore the invitation? *Hands up*. Or accept Betty's invitation? *Hands up*.

Let's pause for a moment of quiet prayer.

Jean: Ainsley, what is your decision?

Ainsley: I'm going to go to the party and have fun! *She turns her sign to the Courage side.*

Jean: It is time to declare what we've learned. *Point to the newsprint*. If we seek the Truth...

Many: we will also find Courage.

Scenario 2

Russ Campanello comes forward, and stands front and center. He holds up the question mark side of the sign.

Russ: I was driving to work one morning. I was running kind of late and was worried about a big presentation I was doing in the afternoon. To avoid the traffic on Route 2, my GPS sent me down a country highway. It was one of those black ice, slippery road situations. I saw a car ahead in the ditch. There was an older man outside looking at his car. I didn't know what was wrong, but I thought he probably needed help. I was late, though, and worried. I figured that he would call AAA for assistance and that pretty soon the police would come. I also heard my mother's voice in my head:

Betsy: *from the balcony*

You need to be careful, Russ. You don't know if this man is for real; it might be a trick to rob you. You probably couldn't help him with his car anyway; that's not your strength. Go on by; you don't want to lose your job!

Russ: So, I didn't stop to offer help. *(pause)*

Work went well that day, but I had a nagging feeling that I hadn't made a good choice. Then, the next Sunday, the scripture was the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), and Bob said:

Bob: *Bob stands up front behind the lectern as if he is preaching to the congregation.*
It often is inconvenient, but when we go out of our way to help someone else, then we are being neighbors to each other as Jesus taught us to do.

Russ: I called my older brother Sunday night.

Earl: *from the balcony*

Hi Russ.

Russ: I told him the situation, and he said:

Earl: I understand your dilemma. I guess it's possible that you might have opened yourself to some trouble if you stopped, and the man might have needed more expertise, but maybe his phone was dead. You could have helped by making a call, or by waiting with him. You're solid in your job. You're a good person. Next time, you can do differently.

Jean: Congregation, what do you think is the right thing to do? Let's have a vote. Don't stop, go on to work. *Hands up.* OR Stop and ask if you can help. *Hands up.*

Let's pause for a moment of quiet prayer.

Russ: Next time, even if I am in a rush, I will stop and ask if I can help. *Turns the sign to the Courage side.*

Jean: So what can we declare? If we seek the Truth... **Many: we will also find Courage.**

Scenario 3

Jean: After the Sunday service, a circle of people has gathered during the coffee hour, and the conversation turns to immigration.

A small group of people comes forward, front and center, arranged in a semi-circle: Cheryl Flynn, Liz Crowell, the Siefers, Judy, and Bob.

Cheryl: *Carrying the question mark sign.* I don't know what to do sometimes. It's hard to know what is right. This week I heard about a family from Honduras, who has come to Acton, trying to make a new life. They have a temporary place to stay by the churches working together there, but the family doesn't speak the language, doesn't know how people do things like get a job, get around, get the kids into school, that sort of thing. I wonder if our church could help.

Bob: This certainly sounds like an idea that fits with who we are and with our Vision statement's emphasis on mission and service!

Shane: It fits with scripture too. I remember verses in Matthew 25 – I’m paraphrasing, but Jesus said, “When I was sick, in prison, and in need, you helped me.”

Judy: Yes, this is all well and good, but we must be practical. What would it cost, and where would we get the money? Who would be responsible? What if they need something in the middle of the night or in the summer when everyone is on vacation? There must be agencies that help people like this.

Trish: Who decides this sort of thing in the church?

Bob: (*In his own words*) Well, the idea can come up in a committee, or can be proposed to a committee like Mission or Social Action as a start. The concept might also be addressed to the Church Council, who might then refer it to the appropriate body. A decision of this kind would eventually, most likely, need to be approved by the Church Council.

Judy: But we’ve never done anything like this before!

Liz: Well, actually, we have. I heard that the Antiques Show started in order to continue helping a young man from Ceylon – I think his name was “Nesan.” He needed life-saving surgery, and the Social Action committee arranged for him to be flown from Ceylon to Boston. After success at Massachusetts General, during follow-up care, he resided with several parishioners. The surgery itself had been donated, but the church raised \$1,600 for his medical care by holding an antique show.

Shane: If we think it is the right thing to do, we can certainly ask and explore, answering some of the good questions. Who knows, maybe we could partner with the Acton UCC church.

Jean: Let’s take a moment of quiet prayer.

Jean: Congregation, were any of you here when Tri Con helped Nesan? Now what do you think about this situation we’ve just described? Should these church members just forget the idea of helping the person from Honduras? *Hands raised.* OR Look into this idea further? *Hands raised.*

Cheryl turns the sign around to the Courage side.

Jean: Thus we say again: If we seek the Truth... **Many: we will also find Courage.**

Jean: So the forty days of Lent can be an important time for *us* too. The wilderness of right and wrong can turn into the wilderness of truth and courage. Through the Holy Spirit, we can help each other come out clearer, stronger, and braver!!

Let’s sing our hymn.

***Hymn # 81** (Dove) “Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days” verses 1 through 3

Jean invites the children to return to their seats.