

CROSS PURPOSES: Divine Dominion

Luke 4:1-13

Text: . . . *One does not live by bread alone.*

Luke 4:4

Introduction

We have designed a sermon series for the next five Sundays in Lent, a series titled *CROSS PURPOSES*. The *double entendre* here is framed on the scriptural evidence that from the very beginning of his ministry Jesus was at cross purposes with cultural conditions of his day as well as with religious leaders who oppressed the people with stringent religious rituals and empty-headed practices. The second understanding of this phrase *cross purposes* is that by the time we accompany Jesus to Jerusalem and ultimately behold him *throned upon that awful tree*, we perceive that there were specific purposes of his cross on Golgotha and that his crucifixion fulfilled a divine plan on our behalf. Today—*CROSS PURPOSES: Divine Dominion*.

All Hell Breaks Loose

As we make our way into the wilderness with Jesus, we remember that immediately prior to this he had been baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. At the time of Jesus' baptism, *the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."*ⁱ According to Luke—and Matthew, Jesus is then *led by the Spirit in(to) the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.*ⁱⁱ Mark's Gospel insists that—after Jesus' baptism, *the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.*ⁱⁱⁱ Whether led or driven, Jesus' wilderness experience is the direct response to the initiative of the Holy Spirit. God is taking him into the wilderness. And that is precisely where—as John Milton reported in *Paradise Lost*—*all hell broke loose*. For forty days he was tempted by the devil, *tempted by Satan, says Mark, and he was with the wild beasts. . .*^{iv} All the evils and atrocities of Jesus' day, all the demonic principalities and powers of Jesus' world, all the ghastly and ghoulish inequities of Jesus' society, all the fiendish and macabre abuses of the Roman occupation conjoined and inhabited this one personification: Satan, the Devil, the Tempter. It was as if *Hell is empty, and all the devils are here*^v in this one embodiment of collective evil. Persistently for forty days, this satanic manifestation attempts to worm into Jesus' mind and sway him from his mission, undermine his allegiances, prey upon his fears, infuse him with doubt, violate his identity, abnegate his relation to the Father, and gratify his lust for life:

If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread. I will give you all the kingdoms of the world, their glory and power, if you will fall down and worship me. If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from this pinnacle.

Show us! Show us! Show us you are the Beloved, God's Son!

Virgil declared that *each of us bears his own Hell.*^{vi} The wilderness must have been Jesus' own Hell. In the midst of the worst of it, could it have occurred to him:

*Why this is hell, nor am I out of it;
Thinkst thou that I who saw the face of God,
And tasted the eternal joys of Heaven,
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells,
In being deprived of everlasting bliss?*^{vii}

Oh! that we could get into Jesus' mind, there to fully understand his torment—its magnitude and severity, there to minister to him in his melancholy, there to commiserate with him in his misery!

*Me miserable! which way shall I fly
Infinite wrath, and infinite despair?
Which way to fly is Hell; myself am Hell;
And in the lowest depth a lower deep
Still threatening to devour me opens wide,
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n.*^{viii}

But at the very nadir of his *infinite despair*—at the penultimate bottom of human existence—Jesus refuses to abort his mandated mission, for which he gave up all of heaven and the continuous countenance of God to accomplish on earth. Perhaps on the fortieth day, summoning up his last ounce of strength, Jesus calls upon the Holy Spirit and rises to his full height, there to resolutely confront that hellish evil that is actively hostile to God. *If you are the Son of God, turn this stone into a loaf of bread.*

Jesus at Cross Purposes

It is written, counters Jesus definitively, 'one does not live by bread alone.'

Each of us bears his/her own Hell. I've been in the wilderness. I suspect you have been as well. Whether we were led or driven in the wilderness, or whether we wandered aimlessly into the wilderness, or whether we had the wilderness thrust upon us, we have struggled in the wilderness. Anyone born into the human condition has wrestled—at one time or another, in one circumstance or another—with the principalities and powers that surround us. Some of us have lost spouses through divorce or illness and death, and all hell broke loose. Some of us have lost huge assets in our investment portfolio during this abominable recession, when all hell broke loose. Some of us have dealt with distracting obsessions in a stressful society, and all hell broke loose. Some of us have enjoyed a long and satisfying career before the dreaded day of retirement arrived, and all hell broke loose. Some of us persistently return to work where supervisors are non-communicative, abusive, and demeaning, where all hell breaks loose, where we could say daily, *Why this is hell, nor am I out of it.*

In the wilderness, *we are often our own worst enemies* by playing into the intentions of the Tempter. *We feed our fears. Deny our abilities. Doubt God's grace and forgiveness. Undermine our confidence. Suppress the promptings of the Spirit.*^{ix} The intentions of demonic forces compete with God's will for human life. In point of fact, our theology teaches us that demonic forces obstruct God and seek to ruin our lives. We know it to be true. Fear, anxiety,

greed, violence, disease; mental, emotional, physical abuse; passion for revenge, obsession with hatred; depression, despair, helplessness, hopelessness.... We have seen—and all too often embraced—the demonic forces that long to destroy us.

In the wilderness the Tempter's voice is always audible: *If you are a favored one of God, a child of God, turn this stone into a loaf of bread: gratify your wanton wants and insatiable desires; make it easy on yourself; turn your back on the purposes of God in your life and build your own sphere of comfort, self-indulgence, and dominance, all the while disregarding the needs of anyone else; remember, you come first. Turn this stone into a loaf of bread for yourself.*

But if we listen in the wilderness, we can hear the Savior's voice as well: *It is written, 'one does live by bread alone.'*

Jesus Christ is at cross purposes with all the demonic forces that would separate us from the worship of God, from the life of faith and from our true selves. We do not live by bread alone. We live, rather, by the sovereignty of God. We live within the Divine Dominion.

Purposes of the Jesus' Cross

The words of the Psalmist capture a glimpse of this sovereign God within whose dominion we live and move and have our being:

*Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place
Age after age.
Before the mountains were born
And earth and land labored in pains of birth,
From eternity to eternity thou are God.^x*

The Psalmist glorifies the Divine Eternity as the only Sovereign Being who is eternal. *Before looking downward he looks upward. Before considering human misery in the wilderness, the Psalmist points to God's majesty in the heavens:*^{xi}

*O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth! . . .
When I look at the heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?^{xii}*

One of the purposes of the cross is to show us that God, who has come to us in his Son Jesus Christ, is the God of the Universe, the sovereign God who is in charge. Whether or not we understand the way he rules his world, we are encompassed within his Divine Dominion. We live within *this most excellent canopy*^{xiii} of space by the sovereignty of God. We move within this most excellent world of beauty unsurpassed by only the heavens above us by the sovereignty of God. We have our being within the embraces of the human family by the sovereignty of God. God is sovereign; God is in control; God has dominion over all he has created. Devils shall have

no dominion. Demons shall have no dominion. *Death shall have no dominion.*^{xiv} So, rise to your full height, look courageously into the face of the Tempter, and let it be known: *One does not live by bread alone* but by the sovereignty of God who is in charge.

Conclusion

So let us come resoundingly to this conclusion: Jesus came to destroy evil, to inaugurate Divine Dominion with the Kingdom of God. In light of this, we can rejoice that:

the Cross is the Sign of the Devil's defeat, and a continual reminder of Him who conquered him (the Tempter); it is also the Sign of Him who "emptied Himself" of His Divine power, in order to express in His own person the Divine self-giving to the uttermost.^{xv}

Whenever we are bearing our own Hell, and wherever we are wandering aimlessly in our own wilderness, be well-assured that Jesus was in the wilderness before us and thereby knows our trials; and he is there with us now, equipping us with the truth.

The most important truth about the Devil is this: Jesus Christ has conquered him.^{xvi} Friends, this is all we need to know about demons!

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Notes

ⁱ Luke 3:22

ⁱⁱ Matthew 4:1; Luke 4:1-2

ⁱⁱⁱ Mark 1:12

^{iv} Mark 1:13

^v Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, I, ii, l. 214

^{vi} Virgil, *Aeneid*, Bk VI, l. 743

^{vii} Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, iii

^{viii} John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Bk IV, l. 73

^{ix} Charles Ringma, *Seize the Day with Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, February 20 entry

^x Psalm 90:1-2

^{xi} The italicized words in this sentence are from Paul Tillich's sermon *On the Transitoriness of Life* from his book of sermons titled *The Shaking of the Foundations*, p. 67.

^{xii} Psalm 8:1, 3-4

^{xiii} Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, II, ii, 318

^{xiv} Title of a poem by Dylan Thomas

^{xv} Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, Dogmatics, Vol. II*, p. 145

^{xvi} Ibid.