

1st Sunday of Lent

Cycle A, 3.5.17

Genesis 2:7-9;3:1-7/Romans 5:12-19

Matthew 4:1-11

PARTNERING WITH GOD'S WORD

I've recently learned a couple new phrases. They're helping me to better understand my world, myself and the Scriptures. And I think they can help us enter into this Lenten Season with eyes opened and hearts renewed. The first phrase is "alternative facts." If you think that this phrase arose from the political warfare currently being waged in our country, you'd be wrong. We just heard the first use of "alternative facts" in one of the most ancient stories of the Bible – the tale of Adam and Eve and their loss of innocence in the Garden of Eden. This classic tale is the part of the Creation myth in the Book of Genesis usually called "The Fall." Remember, calling Bible stories a "myth" doesn't mean they're not true. Myth uses story to illuminate timeless meaning. Myth goes deeper than mere facts. This story of Adam and Eve and the Serpent reminds us how vulnerable we are to temptation, how easily you and I can be deceived, how quickly we forget who we are and why we were created. The "alternative facts" presented by the devil confuse the purpose of our existence and obliterate the goodness and love of God.



In presenting Adam and Eve with "alternative facts," the Tempter sows seeds of doubt in the human heart. We, into whom God has breathed his very breath, creating us in his own image and likeness, calling us into harmony with our world, all peoples and all creation, are now tested by the Serpent's cunning: *Wouldn't you like to be just like God? Don't be silly. Isn't God being a little arbitrary? Eat that fruit!* The Tempter paints a falsified portrait of God and sets up our first parents for competition with God. Eve took the bait and shared it with her mate. Forgetting that she and Adam were already created in the divine image, they took God for their rival instead of their source of life. They abandoned the dance of creature with Creator for a wrestling match they could never win. That drive for independence from God has wreaked havoc for the world ever since. So our Lenten prayer invites us to draw close again to God who is the Source of our life, to reclaim our rightful status as co-Creators with God and to experience again how deeply God loves us and walks with us through the garden each day. By prayer, fasting, and giving to the poor, by whatever means you choose, open your mind and heart to the truth that will set you free: *You are loved by God. You have a profound purpose and play a significant role in this world which no one else can carry out. You have immense capacity to bring light and love into this darkened world. You have a divine destiny when God calls you home to be with God forever.*

The second phrase I learned recently is "thought partner." I heard it at a board meeting during a job interview with a candidate who was describing how she would approach the position were she to be hired. A "thought partner," as I understand its use in the business and work world, is someone who can help you assess a situation that seems puzzling or confusing, and think

about it more clearly in order to figure out the best path to pursue. Alone with our plans and ideas, they can feel like messy knots in our head. The best way to detangle them, and create a clear line to follow can come from a “thought partner” who has our best interest at heart, a listening ear and wisdom and experience that we can trust. Alone and hungry in the desert, Jesus is confronted by Satan as Adam and Eve were in the garden. Once again, the Tempter is armed with “alternative facts” to try to sway Jesus from his mission. Surprisingly, Satan uses the very Word of God, the Scriptures, to bolster his lies.



For his “thought partner,” in order to clear his head and know how to resist Satan, Jesus turns to the Scriptures. In a few brief but powerful sentences, Jesus finds the strength to resist. He tells the devil: “It is written: *One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.*” “Again it is written, *You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.*” It is written: *The Lord, your God, shall you worship and God alone shall you serve.*” With the Word of God to bolster his spirit and strengthen his resolve, Jesus drives Satan away and continues on his path of following God’s Will.

In this week’s bulletin, my friend from Denver, Kathy McGovern, writes in her weekly column: *Are you ready for the temptations of this Lent? Hide your favorite*

scriptures in your heart. She lists a couple biblical one-liners that she turns to for “thought partners:” *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* And, *If today you hear God’s voice, harden not your heart.* It would be a wonderful practice for all of us, young and old, to arm ourselves with the Word of God, memorizing some lines of scripture that can inspire and motivate us, strengthen or console us. Another simple practice is to take the refrain of the Responsorial Psalm that we sing on Sunday and carry it with you throughout the week. I often find myself singing the psalm refrain as a way of taking our Sunday worship into the tasks and challenges of daily work. It becomes my “thought partner” for the week.

I recently watched the Oscar-winning movie Hacksaw Ridge. Typical of Mel Gibson movies, it’s very graphic in depicting the physical horrors of war. It’s not a movie for the squeamish. However, the main character, Desmond Doss, based on the true story of an American combat medic who was a Seventh-Day Adventist Christian, is inspirational. As a pacifist, he refused to carry or use a firearm or weapons of any kind according to his Christian convictions. Risking his own life on the battlefield he rescued seventy-five fellow soldiers. When he first began training with his platoon he was the subject of scorn and ridicule for his religious beliefs and physically abused by fellow soldiers, many of whom he later rescued in the Battle of Hacksaw Ridge.

Doss’s strong faith conviction was a common thread throughout the movie. As his train was leaving for boot camp his fiancé pressed into his hands a small Bible. That little book was seen in his hands throughout the movie. The Word of God was his “thought partner,” strengthening him to live by his convictions and follow the commandment: “Thou shalt not kill.” There were scenes of him sitting on his bunk bed

in his barracks reading his Bible, in spite of the taunting of the other soldiers. Toward the end of the film Doss himself is injured and being carried to the field hospital on a stretcher. He's barely able to speak. Another soldier sees that he's asking for something. Doss's little Bible was lost on the battlefield. The fellow soldier realizes what he's asking for, runs to retrieve it among the carnage and debris and places it back in Doss's hands.



Like fish in the ocean who don't notice the water in which they swim, so it can be for us. We swim in an ocean, we breathe an atmosphere permeated by messages that someone else constructed for us, from songs to television, advertising, to video games, to government. Most are trying to sell us something, from ideology to lifestyle to products and services, even to the attitudes we should take toward the immigrant and the stranger. They are deft at creating needs out of wants and giving us alternative facts. Let this Lenten Season provide us an opportunity for more critical judgement. May the Scriptures be our "thought partner" as we yield to the will of God and open our lives to his amazing grace.

Fr. John Kasper, OFS