**Turning Toward the Costly Journey**

Lent I March 6, 2022

Luke 4: 1-13 Russell Mitchell-Walker

During this pandemic there have been many incidences that have revealed that the system is broken. We have seen too many seniors die in nursing homes that didn’t have the proper care and systems in place. We have seen the poor and racial minorities affected more deeply than the rest of society. We have seen the need for a guaranteed liveable income and the benefit it could be to the society, as we saw federal assistance and support programs roll out and then stop. Now we are witnessing war against Ukraine where one powerful man is holding the world hostage with threats of consequences like we have never seen if NATO or others support Ukraine with military action. Having nuclear weapons as a deterrence has failed when the threat prevents any response. The folly of having such weapons is revealed. Threat of violence does not stop violence. The systems are broken.

Jesus knew this as well. Even in his time, the systems were broken. As he was fasting in the wilderness to discern the direction of his ministry, he was tempted to use the present systems to accomplish his ends. Whether this temptation was offered by a personified devil or a voice in his head, is not as important as the temptations themselves, that he considered them and how he responded to them. This temptation story tells us what strategies he considered to bring about the ‘salvation of his people’ (Luke 1:77). Each of his responses were from Deuteronomy which presents the most clearly articulated rationale of what the Hebrew society was supposed to be – the world as God intended it to be. Fair and just, a shalom community of political justice, economic equity, and spiritual relationality.

The first temptation was about feeding himself, and possibly others. Jesus would have been very hungry after fasting for 40 days. It would have been very tempting to turn stone into bread and feed himself, and that could also solve world hunger. However, it would also mean giving allegiance to the satanic economic system. Jesus knew that there was already enough food for all and the issue was one of distribution. He preferred to draw out people’s generosity to accomplish this, as he did with the feeding of the 5000, where a few loaves and fishes turned into 12 baskets leftover because of people sharing what they had.

The second temptation was to be able to rule all the world’s political systems, which could bring about justice for all, but would only happen if he served the satanic purposes of the political system. He knew that only serving God, and God’s justice and righteousness would accomplish this. The Third temptation was for Jesus to use his miracle-working power to gain control of the nation’s religious system, which had been given over to the satanic commitment to dominate and control the people and the other systems. Jesus’ response was that we are not to test God because religion is not about domination and control, but faith and love.

In all of this Jesus is reminding himself and Satan, what the systems were actually designed by God to be and do. But they had been corrupted by evil, selfishness, greed, and power. Jesus realized that these systems could not be reformed, because their present foundations were built upon greed, power and control. The only way systems that organize public life can be created as systems of justice and equitable stewardship of life as God intended, is to be truly based in relationship with God, with love. The systems and individuals need to be converted. So, Jesus went about preaching this conversion, working to re-establishing the system as God intended. He knew it would not be easy, and it would be costly, but that is road he knew he needed to take. That is the journey of Lent, that costly journey to his death, and resurrection. Following overcoming these temptations, Jesus then begins his ministry in the next section of this chapter with the proclamation that the reading from Isaiah 61 has come true in their hearing:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

 because God has anointed me

 to bring good news to the poor.

God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives

 and recovery of sight to the blind,

 to let the oppressed go free,

to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.

Jesus reminds the community, his home community, that the original intent of God’s community is justice, equity, liberation and love.

We still need this message today, even more so, and there is much work to do to transform the systems that oppress, cause hunger and inequity. We see abuse of power not just in the war against Ukraine but in the over [40 wars](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-4453666/The-world-war-Interactive-map-reveals-conflicts.html) or conflicts in the world today. We have seen the economy winning out and being seen as more important than people as governments open up before it is fully safe to do so. Yet, we are called to love and work for justice. We hold onto the hope of new life and that we are not alone on the journey. We hold onto the ways that people around the world, but particularly in Ukraine are challenging the system and the odds, by creatively resisting and holding back the powers that would destroy them. We hold onto the love of Jesus, who was willing to give all for the new order, the new system based on loving relationships, equity, and justice. May we follow the calling this Lenten season, to work towards this shalom community of God with renewed vigor, commitment and hope.