

**A Sermon from the Episcopal Parish of
St. John the Evangelist in Hingham, Massachusetts
Preached by the Rev. Timothy E. Schenck on March 6, 2022 (1 Lent, Year C)**

When I was a kid I would sometimes tag along with my father to orchestra rehearsals. Some of you know he was a conductor with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra in the 1970s and so when a babysitter got sick or my mother was working, I'd accompany my dad to the old Lyric Theater downtown. When I wasn't hanging out in the dressing room with the poker-playing horn players or wandering around backstage among the huge double bass cases and assorted tympanis, I'd be out exploring the red velvet-lined boxes in the balcony.

You could say that one of the soundtracks of my childhood was the tuning of the orchestra. If you've ever been to a classical music concert you know that they all start with the same ritual tuning. After a nod from the concertmaster, the principal oboe player gives them an A and then the rest of the orchestra tunes their instruments off of the oboe which, of all the instruments, provides the truest pitch. It just takes a few moments, but they would always tune up at the beginning of the rehearsal and then periodically throughout their time together if my father heard something that didn't sound quite right.

Over time instruments naturally get out of tune if left alone. Strings, in particular, are very sensitive to cold or humidity. A violin string might stretch out, causing it to go flat; or constrict, causing it to go sharp. And so a violinist must do a bit of fine-tuning with the pegs to get the instrument back in playing condition.

In a sense, the season of Lent is the church's tuning peg. As our priorities become slightly off key, Lent brings us back into tune; allowing us to again live in harmony with God. It's easy to let our spiritual lives get away from us. We get busy; we get self-absorbed; we get bogged down by endless activities. We let the minutia of life drive our priorities and suddenly we find ourselves out of tune with the Spirit. It might be subtle to the point that we hardly notice that our spiritual life has gone a bit flat. Or it might be strident, atonal disharmony. A pandemic that has thrown our worship habits out of whack certainly doesn't help. But either way, if we allow it, Lent holds the potential to bring our spiritual lives back into tune. It encourages self-reflection and a return to the basics of our faith.

And this season specifically set aside as a time of spiritual renewal, is rooted in the 40 days and 40 nights Jesus spent in the wilderness following his baptism; the place where he was tempted by the devil, as we hear this morning. Jesus is tempted with bodily cravings, wealth, and power. The devil says, 'You're hungry? Turn this stone into a loaf of bread.' 'You want glory? Worship me and I'll give you all the kingdoms of the world.' 'You say you're the Son of God? Prove it by throwing yourself off this cliff.'

In effect, the devil is holding out those words we say at the end of the Lord's Prayer: "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory." That's what he's offering — kingdom, power, and glory; that's what he's using as a lure to tempt Jesus. You can have it all, he tells Jesus, if only you fall down and worship me. And if Jesus wasn't Jesus, he might have gone for all this. Because the devil is holding out all the markers of worldly success: renown and riches and rule. What else even is there?

But Jesus is not about kingly treasure and worldly possessions and human glory. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory. Yes, that's true. But not in the way the devil understands such things. For Jesus, it is the kingdom *of God*, the power *of God*, and the glory *of God*.

Following his baptism, Jesus was driven out into the wilderness by the Spirit *of God*. Jesus' power derives exclusively from his position as the Son *of God*. God alone is the source of the kingdom, and the power, and the glory — not the world, not ourselves, not any institution or human being, certainly not the diabolical forces of wickedness personified by the devil.

And the devil simply couldn't understand this. The devil can't even relate to someone who is not driven by earthly passions and desires. So the true depth of this whole interaction takes place well beyond the surface of what we see and hear. This temptation exists on a cosmic level that highlights the choice about which kingdom Jesus represents: will he side with the powers and principalities of *this* world, or will he side with the reign of God and the world that is to come?

The answer is clear to us now, but Jesus had to endure the temptation in the wilderness in order to show us what really matters in this life. And, despite the impressive Biblical repartee, that back and forth between the devil and Jesus, I don't believe this was all just a show for our benefit. We hear that Jesus was famished and weak, and thus particularly vulnerable. He was actually tempted and part of him, the very human part, must have at least considered the devil's offer. Who wouldn't have?

But this scene also forces us, 2,000 years later, to decide what matters to us the most: our own needs and desires and perspective, or God's. Whose kingdom, whose power, whose glory will we follow? That's the choice held out to us as we enter into the season of Lent, as we seek to re-tune our spiritual lives.

Now, it's true that these days our entire world feels out of tune. Our hearts ache for the people of the Ukraine as we watch oppression roll in and refugees roll out, literally before our eyes. Injustice and violence fester throughout the world in places both near and far. Even amid some real signs of hope, this ongoing global pandemic continues to take a toll upon our physical and mental well-being, and on that of our loved ones. In so many ways, disharmony reigns.

And so I encourage you to use this season of Lent to re-tune your spiritual life. We can't fix everything in the world. But we can attend to the stirrings of our souls. And by doing so, we can be bearers of God's grace in uncertain moments. We can drive out fear with hope. We can offer love in the face of oppression. This is what will change the world: being in tune with God and walking in harmony with one another. And we begin by choosing God's kingdom and God's power and God's glory.

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