**SERMON Luke 4:1-13 (Good Enough 1)**

I remember with distinct clarity, catching my mom in a lie. It wasn’t a big one, it didn’t have massive repercussions, but it happened after church one Sunday. Another lady approached her to help volunteer for something, and my mom declined saying that we were out of town or going to visit my grandparents that day. That moment has been seared in my memory. Up until that point my parents were the model of truth-telling. They were above reproach, and here…in one second, I caught my mom in an instance of dishonesty, and I was floored. I remember her turning to me, shooting a glance in my direction. No words were needed, her message was crystal clear even at 5 or 6 years old, “do not breath a word.”

And after that I was more attentive to the behavior of adults around me than ever before. I zeroed in on the moment I heard my 2rd grade teacher, Mrs. Webb, cussing, in school. I remember when I found out that my pastor, a man of God, a graduate of Cambridge University, brewed beer in his closet…in the parsonage.

I’m sure that you have also had *your* *own* moments as a child, when the bubble burst, and the people in your life that you held in such high esteem, fell from grace. We had placed them up on an impossibly high pedestal…close to perfection in some cases (unbeknownst to themselves of course). They were our models …and these moments –of lying, cussing, and even homebrewed beer– represented a massive shift in our estimations of them.

We all know now that none of these folk were even actually perfect. They never claimed to be. And as we mature through life, our awareness of our own imperfections only grows, and deepens. The imperfections are no longer funny. Moments of dishonesty break trust, and severe relationships. Moments of anger and emotional outbursts can reveal deep-seated self-doubt or unprocessed trauma. You cheated. Or he did. Your resentments grow. The pressure for caring for loved ones becomes overwhelming. Your job or career path isn’t as fulfilling or has financially stable as you had hoped. You still harbor unchecked prejudices, uninterrogated racist ideology, frustratingly pervasive homophobia or transphobia. You want to be more enlighten, but feel like you are fighting a losing battle. And there’s more days where you feel out-of-sorts than not. [PAUSE] This is the real stuff. These are the uncomfortable imperfections of our own humanity. You wanted to be more: happier, healthier, more grounded. But you’re not.

LINK

This Lent, we are reckoning will these real-life imperfections. The kind that shame builds up around. The kind that our society, and our faith would sometimes wish we would keep hidden. Stuffed down and out of sight. But, it turns out that it is in our very real imperfections, that we have an opportunity to encounter very real holiness, some inexplicable sense of God’s divinity.

THEOLOGY

For me, the notion of perfection, was reinforced by the theology of my Wesleyan upbringing. John Wesley the founder of the Methodist movement was meticulous about his behavior and his attitude, striving for excellence and near perfection. In a club he started in Oxford/Cambridge with his brother Charles, they and the other young men gathered sought to interrogate their every daily thought, word, and deed by posing one another 22 Questions (and you can find them online). All in an effort to aid the process of sanctification, to get closer and closer to this idea of Holy Perfection. Their club, in fact, became known as The Holy Club. And Holiness Movements can be found within most mainline Christians traditions, particularly in the West. These religious movements helped bake into the American culture, and into capitalism, the idea that perfection is something attainable.

GOOD ENOUGH SERIES

Over the next 6-weeks our worship is inspired by a book of 40-or-so devotions called “Good Enough” written by Kate Bowler. *You can purchase the book and follow along in the daily reading; you received the reading Companion in your email this week.* She says that we are living under the weight of the Perfectibility Paradigm. Our culture and yes, even our Christian practice, often combines unrealistic expectations with an unhealthy preoccupation with faults, weaknesses, mistakes, and sins. Demanding that we continually try harder, do better, study longer, earn more, eat less, get stronger, be thinner, sleep less. Failure isn’t an option. After all, other people are already at the finish line. Other people are living beautiful, joyful, effortless lives. Living life to the fullest, understanding their one life’s purpose, and doing it with no regrets or self-doubt.

But here *you* are, here *we* are. Anything but perfect. Deeply flawed. Completely ordinary. Good…enough.

TEXT

Our ordinariness is most visible when we are in need. Our humanness is most visible when we are vulnerability. Which brings us to our text for this morning. Where we return to the passage I read at our Ash Wednesday service. Where we drew solace in the fact that the incarnate God experienced the ordinariness of being human, in the loneliness and hardship of the wilderness. God, through Jesus, experienced the way that human ordinariness opens us up, exposes us and makes us painfully aware of our brokenness, a intimately vulnerable to the false messages of a world that says we can have it all.

There are three moments of testing that a character called “the devil” or the “Diabolic One,” puts in front of Jesus, in Luke 4, when he is at his lowest ebb, at his most vulnerable, at his most human and his most ordinary. And what I want us to hear in the words of the Diabolic One are echoes of the promises that our culture and (yes, sometimes our understanding of it means to be a good Christian) routinely make. Promises that try to convince us that perfection is possible, is attainable.

The first, in verse 3-4, is to “turn stones into bread.” Jesus is physically hungry. His human body needs nourishment to function properly. And while it may have been a while since you’ve experienced real hunger, most of us can identify on some level with the primal fear brought on by food insecurity or simply just being hangry. Hunger is a vulnerability. Sometimes we do the wrong thing when we are hungry. We get cranky, we make bad choices, we eat whatever is available regardless of whether it does or does not nourish us. And the Diabolic One KNOWS this. And it is at THIS MOMENT OF ORDINARY HUMAN VULNERABILITY that the Diabolic One hopes to exploit. He points out “Right now, you don’t have all you need…but you could.” The Diabolic One is trying to leverage Jesus’ fear that he won’t have enough or have what he needs.

Isn’t this the fear that we all have, in a world of limited resources? A fear and an insecurity that the marketing industry builds whole advertising campaigns around. You don’t have all you need…but you could. Just buy this…just start this program…just use this serum, this product. And Jesus’ response reveals that he sees straight through the Diabolic One’s hollow promise. Jesus knows that the price of giving in to the temptation to meet his immediate need is too great and won’t result in perfect satisfaction anyway. Even in his ordinary vulnerable moment of physical hunger, Jesus chooses to reach for true nourishment. Quoting Moses in Deuteronomy, “One does not live by bread alone.”

The second test, verses 5-8, “to rule all the kingdoms of the world.” Jesus is experiencing ordinary vulnerable human limitations. Unlike an all-powerful diety, humans cannot be all things to all people. We cannot meet all needs, solve all problems, as much as we would like to. How many of us have contemplated what it might be like to be President, or even ruler of the world, only to balk at the weight of the responsibility and our inability to see all sides of all problems simultaneously.

You see, for good people, faithful people, wanting to effect good in the world, to bring about justice and peace…it seems like, the more influence you have, the better. Traditions that prioritize evangelism and proselytizing know this. After all, you’re doing good work. And in an attempt to exploit this ordinary vulnerability, the Diabolic One says “Right now, you are not as influential as you can be.” You hear how diabolical this promise really is? But, Jesus knows, and reminds us, that power and position can easily corrupt our intentions, and become the thing that we chase after more than anything else. And he quotes Moses again, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”

The third test is, “throw yourself down from the pinnacle of the Temple and let the angels catch you”. In this temptation, the Diabolic One offers Jesus a way OUT of the ordinariness, out of this human vulnerability, out of the shame and discomfort of human frailty and brokenness. The temptation whispers to Jesus: “Right now, you don’t have to endure hardships.” “You have power and privilege that you are underutilizing.” “You deserve to be able to do whatever you want when you want to. And others will come, fill in the gaps, meet your needs, and look after you.” Yet Jesus chooses to stay human, to stay ordinary, to stay vulnerable.

WHY? Friends, I believe it was to show us that ordinary life can be holy. Ordinary, incomplete, regular human lives…imperfect in ways that are ridiculous, and imperfect in ways that cause ourselves and others deep wounds…can experience the holiness of God. The comfort of God. The forgives of God.

LINK

I do not imagine that this sermon will settle centuries of Christian debate about ‘just how good we are,’ but I will say this: Perfection is impossible, but transformation isn’t. We can change a bit if we really want to. We can reject messages that make us feel like we have hide in the shadows, under mountains shame, just to face the real world. And that’s the good news that we find modelled by Jesus in our passage today. Ordinary Life can indeed by Holy. The choice to change, or to reject false promises, are embedded in every day from the moment we wake up. And each day we reach for a faith that is never perfect, will never be perfect. But good enough.

CONCLUSION

Kate Bowler reminds us, “that closeness with God is not just a question of belief. It is also in the small actions we take. A good enough faith is not reaching for the impossible. We can’t be everything to everyone perfectly or even enough for ourselves. We are human.” We are ordinary “A good enough faith looks for beauty and truth in what is possible.” This Lent, we will aim to carve out some space between despair and hope, between believing that everything is possible, and nothing is possible. We are on the lookout for beauty and meaning and truth in the midst of ordinary lives that didn’t turn out like we thought that they would. But, we can have lives where God breaks in and surprises us. We can learn to believe that we are blessed, regardless of how our lives appear on social media or at high school reunions. We can begin to feel less alone, more loved and less judged when imperfection is all we have, and brokenness is all we can offer, when good is…enough.