

Re:Lent - “Re:sist”

Luke 4:1-13 and Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

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- I saw a movie trailer the other day.
- It was an action film...I can't remember its name.
- But here's the gist of the trailer:
- Classic story.
- Two parties, battling against each other.
- The villain appears, in this trailer, to be the “Goliath”-type character - a big bully - that is doing all he can to overpower his “David-type” foe.
- There's explosions.
- There's destruction.
- It's an action film, after all.
- And in every action film, the villain has to be fighting against?
- That's right. A hero.
- And so the hero in this film is one who most-definitely seems to be the underdog.
- The one that has been picked on all of its life.
- And, in classic-fashion, when the movie's villain starts to pick on the movie's hero, what does the hero do?
- That's right.
- Fight back.
- Stand up for himself.
- Say, “I'm not going to tolerate this.”
- They're going to Resist.
- As we enter into our “Re:lent” sermon series, Ash Wednesday had us thinking of the ways that we would “reply” or “respond” to God during this season of Lent.
- Hence the “re” of the “re:lent” series.
- This morning, we focus on the word “re:sist”.
- The word makes perfect sense to focus on this morning, considering this morning's gospel lesson follows Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the Devil.
- Just after Jesus was baptized, he was sent to the desert.
- Well, in Luke it's called “the wilderness”.
- But whatever you call it, Jesus is sent out, to be by himself, to pray and fast, for 40 days.

- And during this season, Jesus is tempted three times by the devil.
- The first: the devil encourages him to turn a stone into bread so that Jesus may no longer be hungry.
- Jesus “resists” temptation by saying, “One does not live by bread alone.”
- The second: the devil shows him all of the kingdoms and says that by simply worshiping him (the devil), then it all could be Jesus’s for the taking.
- Jesus “resists” temptation by saying: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”
- The third: the devil encourages Jesus to jump off a cliff so that Jesus can prove he is, indeed, the Son of God because of what it says in the scriptures...
- Yup - that’s right - the devil quoting scripture and throwing it back in Jesus’ face as a means to really get him good..
- Does Jesus fall for it?
- Nope.
- Jesus resists temptation by saying: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”
- Author Debie Thomas notes that each of the three temptations presented to Jesus get at the core within most humans: hunger, ego, and safety.
- By giving into the temptation of food, Thomas notes that Jesus would, then, *“cheat” his way to satisfaction, instead of waiting, paying attention to his hunger, and leaning into God for its lasting fulfillment. Along the way, the devil encourages Jesus to disrespect and manipulate creation for his own satisfaction. To turn what is not meant to be eaten – a stone – into an object he can exploit.”¹*
- Oof.
- Disrespect and manipulate creation to his own satisfaction...almost seems like that could be one of the plot lines of that movie whose trailer I saw.
- But we’ll get back to the movie in a minute.
- Secondly, for the devil to target Jesus’ ego is to encourage Jesus to claim the power and authority that is due to him. Thomas wonders, in her writings, *“how important is it to us that we’re noticed? Praised? Liked?”²*
- Third, by tempting Jesus to throw himself off a cliff - quite a dramatic ask, when you think about it - then God will protect him.
- But with Jesus confident in all that God can do for him, he stands up to the temptation, looks it in the eye, and says, basically: “Look, I don’t need to do any of that in order to convince you - or me - that I’m protected and safe because of my God. So don’t try it, Ok?”

¹ <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay>

² Ibid

- Jesus chooses to live in an uncomfortable, difficult place because he had faith that God would be with him.
- We, too, have those times when we sit in a difficult place, whether we want to or not...when we're there, do we have confidence that God will be with us?
- Are we able to resist the temptation to take the easy way out because it would be...well...easy?
- Do we trust ourselves enough - do YOU trust YOURSELF enough to have faith in yourself and in God to resist temptation?
- That's the other way to look resisting temptation.
- However, let's go back to the first.
- That other form of "resistance" - that one I was talking about earlier that I was reminded of with that movie trailer I was telling you about.
- Except it's not a movie, folks.
- It's playing out in real life.
- In real time.
- On the other side of the world.
- I'm not telling anyone anything they don't know when I name that not quite two weeks ago, Russia began bombing the Ukraine, thereby declaring war on the country.
- The "villain" of this action-movie-that-writes-itself-in-real-time seems to be Russia's leader, Vladimir Putin.
- The "hero" of this non-movie action movie is...well...any myriad of Ukrainians that have presented themselves as such since the invasion began.
- They have resisted - stood up to and against - those that are oppressing.
- Like the farmer who hitched a Russian tank to his tractor and towed it away.
- Or like Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who declined offers for safe exits from his country to instead, stay and fight for it alongside his country's army.
- Or there's the Ukrainians who have resisted in a way that should serve as testament to the world for how to reflect the light of Christ, even in the face of danger.
- Instead of punishing the Russian soldiers that surrender to those in the Ukraine, at least in one case - the detained were given tea, something to eat, and the opportunity to video-call their mother.
- Compassion.
- As resistance.
- It's resistance of a different form.

- Sure - there's the need to resist those things that tempt us.
- The personal, individual “resistance”.
- Resisting the temptation for the addict to have “just one”.
- Resisting the temptation to gossip.
- Resisting the temptation to stay quiet when you hear harmful talk.
- Or, at the least, resisting the temptation to participate in it.
- It’s tempting to just sit back and participate passively in our own lives - it’s work to see and hear and notice and do something.
- Resisting NOT doing something.
- But then there’s the communal one.
- The opportunity to stand up against what is wrong.
- No matter how small.
- But what can that look like?
- Maybe it’s attending a peaceful protest.
- Or writing a letter to elected officials.
- Or working toward real change in your community - perhaps under the umbrella of one of the tenets of being a Matthew 25 congregation like we are here at Fellowship?
- To build congregational vitality?
- To dismantle structural racism?
- To eradicate systemic poverty?
- Or, even on what may seem like a smaller scale: Standing up to a bully at school. Or at work. Or in your friend group...Because, unfortunately, microaggressions are a thing...and you know they are there too.
- Or, at the least, befriending the one being bullied, as a way to extend care to them?
- While we don’t have Putin over here, there are bullies everywhere.
- The ways that we describe people - can we call it out when we see it or hear it?
- What does compassionate resistance look like every single day?
- In our own lives?
- Can THAT form of resistance be a “reply” or “response” to God during Lent?
- How awesome would it be if we could write more movies about THAT kind of resistance someday...and not have to make any of it up.
- Let’s give it a try drafting that script with our actions.
- May it be so.
- Amen.