

March 24, 2020

Greetings in the Name of Jesus,

I want to thank Dan Collison for today's devotional thought. If you have a devotional thought you would like to share, please send it along to rspin6477@aol.com. And tomorrow (Wednesday), at 11 a.m., call in if you would like, and we will share, pray, and support each other. If you are reading this Tuesday, I will be unavailable today. God willing and boats running I will be in Boston for a necessary eye procedure. No reading for 24 hours.

God Bless

Roger

Matthew 4:1-10 New International Version (NIV)

Jesus Is Tested in the Wilderness

4 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. **2** After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. **3** The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. **6** "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:

"He will command his angels concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.' "

7 Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' "

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. **9** "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.' "

Reflections on the 3 Temptations of Christ (Matt 4:1-11) with reference to COVID-19:

The ability to "turn stones into bread" is the temptation of self-sufficiency. As people of Christ, we are linked to each other through Him. Someone who tried to stand aside would be disconnecting from God. None of us can truly be a "Prepper" by assembling enough supplies to wait out the End of the World, because, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word of God."

Our need for "daily bread" means we are dependent on farmers, farm workers, millers, bakers, truckers, grocers, restaurateurs and inn-keepers. We need bread because we have bodies, which means we are also interdependent with nurses, doctors, law enforcement, military, engineers, manufacturers and garbage handlers. Indeed, we are interconnected with the wide world. Our COVID-19 tests rely on cotton swabs — Q-tips — which we in the USA lack and have urgently ordered from overseas, along with smartphones and parts for our ICU ventilators.

Note: Prudent prepping is good, as Luther pointed out. We must always be ready to serve God's Kingdom whenever the occasion arises (Matt 25:1-13; Matt 25:31-40; Luke 24:13-35). In the story of Mary and Martha, Martha was an unskillful "prepper." Christ reminded Martha that her over-prepping was a form of worry that pulled her away from what was most important, which was recognizing His presence. He instructed Martha to discern what was truly needful, as Mary did; this is our daily charge, as well.

"Cast yourself off the parapets" represents two potential sins. The first is the temptation to be popular or to amaze and impress. Sometimes the unpopular thing is the right choice, even at the risk of looking like an alarmist or a kill-joy. If you saw someone on the train tracks, and it was the train tracks of a bullet train, which this person had no concept of, and that person didn't know that the train was coming, it is good to warn him to get away before he is run over, even if he mocks you for being an alarmist. For those people who say, "let the fool be run over," in many situations, for every fool on the train tracks, many hundreds or thousands on the bullet train or in the community will also die from the collision.

Thus, "parapets" also refers to the broader sin of "tempting God" by thinking that one is above the laws of physics or biology. We have all seen examples of people being willful in denying the dangers of the virus, endangering not just themselves but us all. Like many of us, I get dismayed when some people confuse faith in God as requiring defiance of scientific knowledge. As Luther might say, don't tempt God by being willful or deliberately ignorant. One of the world's major experts in pandemics, Larry Brilliant, is a man of faith; his homespun guideline for everyday life is, "Make room for God, make room for love, and never ever lose your sense of humor."

Speaking as a doctor, for at least 5 reasons, this viral pandemic is even faster, more invisible and more dangerous than a bullet train. These 5 reasons are hard to understand, including for "Uncle John" from Roger's story last week. Unseen dangers are why we need to search out and trust in science and expertise, as we do with our airplane pilots, engineers and furnace technicians. If we were to let amateurs decide how these professionals should work, air travel, car travel and the furnaces in our houses would kill us all.

"Reign over all kingdoms of the earth" is the temptation of social or political power — using a situation, big or small, for unseemly personal or group gain. This temptation isn't just for leaders or politicians — it's for all of us. We know Christ wants us to be a neighbor and not be selfish, thoughtless, nor willfully indifferent to the plight of others. This time especially calls for solidarity and for us to use our individual gifts and advantages to promote neighborliness, in true Christian fashion.

PRAYER

May we place our selves in the hands of God. In the quiet of the moment, O God, make us thankful for those who serve us in so many ways at this time and help us to see those to whom we might offer support and love. Amen.