

“The devil made me do it!”
Matthew 4:1-11
Brentwood First Presbyterian
Mike Magee
2/10/08

Scene 1 Jesus is HONGREY!

My patient

I try to listen to more than just verbal content. I try to listen to body language, facial expression, and tone of voice. One of my patients last week would not look me in the face, and would not smile. Both avoidance of gaze and absence of a smile were atypical for her. I asked her what was up. She told me her gastroenterologist put her on clear liquids in anticipation of a colonoscopy, and she was HONGREY! Not hungry. HONGREY!

Jesus

Jesus had been fasting in the desert for 6 weeks. I think he was not hungry. I think he also was HONGREY!

Our hunger

We also are HONGREY. We are HONGREY for self worth, for meaning, and for inspiration. We are HONGREY for closeness, understanding, and harmony. We don't get these things from television or the internet. Oh we try, but we just cannot fish them out of the internet or TV. We also are HONGREY.

Transition

But we are tempted to satisfy our hunger with the wrong things.

Scene 2 We are tempted to satisfy our hunger with the wrong things

We are tempted

We ourselves read this scripture and are tempted to think it is out of touch. What did Jesus know of the temptations faced daily by the recovering alcoholic or substance abuser? The lonely divorcee? The struggling business owner? The teenager who covets acceptance above all? We may not be tempted to turn stones into bread. But we are tempted to forget about leaning on God's strength. We may not be tempted to jump off a cliff. But we are tempted to forget God's promise to help us. We may not be tempted to pagan idolatry. But it is difficult to worship and serve God only.

We are broken creatures

We are broken because our relationships with God, each other, the rest of creation, and even with our selves is bruised. Bruised and broken because of bad choices. Choices we made under the influence. Under the influence of nature and nurture. Sigmund Freud said everything we choose to be and do is impacted by nature and nurture. That we are perfectly predictable creatures, if one knew all of our nature and all of our nurture. Nature and nurture that affects all our choices. Alfred Lord Tennyson said we think we are free, but like the waves breaking on the beach, we are actually singing in our chains like the sea. We are tempted by our nature and nurture to satisfy our hunger with things that cause brokenness.

We are tempted by nature

Studies show that the most common personality disorder is narcissism. We think the world revolves around us. That nothing can hurt us. Jesus is tempted to test his divinity by jumping off a cliff. We are born into this, and have to be taught humility and altruism. Humility and altruism do not come naturally. Studies also show that we are born into a struggle for power. We fight to preserve ourselves and the things we want." Jesus is tempted to crown himself king of the nations. We have to be taught that only by working together do we each get more of what we want. That only when society benefits do we benefit. This also does not come naturally. We have to be taught collaboration.

We are tempted by nurture

Sometimes our culture, our nurture, teaches us humility, altruism. But sometimes our culture promotes narcissism. Need examples? How about beauty pageants and body building contests? I am dissing neither beauty pageants nor body building contestants. No. I am merely challenging a culture that promotes a "me" generation, instead of a "we" mentality. Sometimes our culture, our nurture, teaches us collaboration. But sometimes our culture idolizes power instead of love. How about our society's need for competitive sports? We're number 1! I am not dissing sports. No. I am merely challenging a culture that promotes violent sports. I am told the coach of a local private high school told his teenage football players that their job was to put someone from the other team in the hospital each Friday night. Do you think Jesus would approve of this?

We are tempted to satisfy our hunger at work

We are tempted to satisfy our hunger with addictions. Addiction to work. We are tempted to satisfy our hunger for self worth, meaning, and inspiration at work. But what happens when our work fires us, or the business goes under, and all of our self worth, meaning, and inspiration are tied up at work? If we have idolized work, instead of God, when the going gets tough we become broken. Broken by addiction to work. When work consumes us, we have nothing left over for family, friends, or even God.

We are tempted to satisfy our hunger with family and friends

We are tempted to satisfy our hunger for closeness, understanding, and harmony with family and friends. Yes, addiction to family and friends. But what happens when there is an argument, or miscommunication, or distrust at home or among our friends? And what happens when there is divorce? Or when a friend or family member betrays us? And all of our closeness, understanding, and harmony are tied up in family and friends, because no time has been made for God? Once again, if we have idolized family and friends, instead of God, when we hit that rocky road, we become broken. Broken by addiction to family. When family and friends consume us, we have nothing left over for God. We are tempted to satisfy our hunger with the wrong things.

Transition

Freud tells us our decisions draw from only two sources, nature and nurture. But Freud was wrong.

Scene 3 God is the third influence

No one wants to take responsibility anymore

I remember a "Peanuts" strip in which Marcia telephones Charlie Brown: "Guess what, Chuck...the first day of school, and I got sent to the principal's office. It was your fault, Chuck." "My fault?" Charlie Brown replies surprised. "How could it be MY fault? Why

do you always say everything is MY fault!" "You're my friend, aren't you, Chuck? You should have been a better influence on me!" Have you ever gone to a restaurant, hung up your coat, and noticed a sign warning that the management is not responsible if it gets lost or stolen? Ever read the small print on your airplane ticket? The airline takes no responsibility for any delays or missed connections, and if your baggage is lost, they only have to pay an amount agreed upon at a convention they held in Warsaw in 1955. Park your car in some high-priced garage or lot, and a sign will tell you that management is not responsible for any items lost or stolen from your vehicle. Do those "Not responsible for..." disclaimers bother you? They do me. It seems no one takes responsibility for anything anymore. I read about a man who was suing a hospital. A doctor had performed staple surgery on his stomach to help him lose weight. A couple of days after his operation, he raided the hospital refrigerator and stuffed himself with everything he could find. This tore open the staples and forced another surgery. He was suing the hospital for having a refrigerator near his room. He claimed the temptation was too great. Thus, his complications were not his own fault but the hospital's fault! We blame our nature and nurture without taking time to look for other influences. Like Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, we say, "The devil made me do it!"

Where we encounter God

Yes, Sigmund Freud was wrong. Because he does not take into account a third influence. Yes, besides the **sometimes** demonic influence of nature and nurture, there is a third influence. God. And where do we find God? In scripture. Where you open a Bible, people gather. Debbie started a Bible study two years before I was called to Brentwood First. At first only two of her friends came. But before Brentwood First called me 15 months ago, there were 20 people in her weekly Bible study. Last August, I showed up to start a weekly Bible study on Thursday afternoons at the Heritage at Brentwood retirement center. Two people came, a retired Baptist minister and his wife. Last Thursday, we had 16. Where you open a Bible, people gather.

How we encounter God

Do we find in scripture a distant God who created the world and took a vacation? No, I don't think so, though scripture has been read that way before. Do we find in scripture Casper the Friendly Ghost, who cannot feel our pain? No, I don't think so, though again, scripture has been read that way before. Do we find in scripture a rule book? No, Jesus specifically came down on the Pharisees because they perverted God's love letter to humankind into a book of rules. Because we are tempted to replace love with power. Why? Maybe because power offers an easy substitute for the hard task of love. It seems easier to think we are God, than to love God. It seems easier to control people, than to love people. It seems easier to own life, than to love life. Jesus asks, Do you love me? And in response, we ask, Can we sit at your right and left hand in your Kingdom? (Mt. 20:21). ... We are tempted to replace love with power. But looking at the Old Testament through lens of the New, through the lens of the Good News, we find a book describing God's unconditional and all inclusive love. Undeserving love God first gives us. And in response, we give God and our fellow humankind back this same love, or as close as our limited faculties will allow. The secret is out. The secret to keeping temptation at bay. Be faithful to your calling as God's child.

Conclusion

HONGREY, choices we make to satisfy our hunger: narcissism, body building contests, and “we’re number one!” Idolatry in work, family, and friends. Choices we make that leave us singing in our chains like the sea. Choices that promote brokenness instead of wholeness. But there is a third influence. We can encounter God in worship and in Bible study. All glory be to God, and all God’s children say