

Lent 1, March 10, 2019. St. Augustine's in-the-Woods Episcopal Church Freeland WA. Nigel Taber-Hamilton. Deuteronomy 26:1-11, Romans 10:8b-13, Luke 4:1-13

For Jesus, something new is about to begin, so he does what we often do in preparation for newness – take some time away to reflect, take in the landscape, consider the way forward.

What stands as a roadblock – or roadblocks – to that way forward for Jesus?

First, he considers means and ends. When I was on my personal discernment retreat – here called BACCM – where the Commission on Ministry makes a semi-final recommendation about whether or not someone should move forward in the ordination process – I recall in an “after the day relaxation moment” one of the interviewers shared some of his background with the group. It turned out that he was an ethical advisor to the Prime Minister. “What does that mean?” we asked. “It means,” he said, “I go down into the [situation room] with the PM and advise him when it is appropriate to use nuclear weapons.” The phrase “ethical dilemma” comes to mind!

Jesus' ethical dilemma is here presented as this: “If you could provide bread for the hungry of the world, wouldn't you do it, even if the source of that bread was unnatural and ungodly? Wouldn't that be the right thing to do, even if the way its done is wrong?”

Directly connected to means-and-ends is the issue of power. How many leaders have started out with the best of intentions but become blinded to their own questionable actions by their belief that only they have the true answer to their world's problems. After all, they come to believe, if only they have the answer, then why not go ahead and fix things, even if others disagree. “If you could fix this sad, warring, impoverished world, and bring peace and harmony,” says Jesus' adversary, “wouldn't you do it, even if it meant abandoning your faith and using authoritarian means?”

And finally, the appeal to vanity – ego – that goes hand-in-hand with power. We don't have to look far to find leaders whose ego needs respond most frequently to flattery, and criticism - implied or actual, accurate or not : “Well, lets say you really ARE the Son of God – you need to prove it! Show people who's really in charge, who really has God's support.”

These are timeless temptations – raising ends over means; the seductive distortions of power; the dangers manipulations invited by vain ego needs – timeless, but also very situational, very specific to Jesus' moment, at the beginning of his work. They represent what appeared to be shortcuts but were actually dead-ends.

Jesus resisted them here, and so he serves a model for us about how we respond to the challenges – temptations – we encounter every day of our lives.

What are your temptations at this moment? What are the apparent short-cuts that are likely to prove dead-ends?

I think they fall into two categories: personal temptations, and community temptations – and each

informs the other. I don't know what your individual temptations are, though I can guess at some of them – just like you can probably make a pretty good guess at my temptations. Part of the journey of Lent is in outing our temptations and emasculating them.

The communal temptations are easier to identify, especially as you enter a period of transition.

One of the most obvious comes to you through the curse of language choice. In the Church of England, the time after one rector leaves and another comes is called an *interregnum*; from that word we here get the word *interim*. The English word – *interregnum* – means “any period during which a state has no ruler or only a temporary one.” The word *interim* means “a temporary or provisional arrangement; stopgap; makeshift.”

Temporary leadership; a provisional arrangement, a stopgap, makeshift...! Those are loaded words. They imply that, without ordained leadership, everything you do is provisional, a stopgap, makeshift, provisional. How does that make you feel?! If I were in your shoes, I know how I'd feel!

For me, that says several things. At the least, it says that whoever decided that this period between rectors is “interim” hasn't read 1 Corinthians 12; and it says that – by the deciders – non-ordained leadership is 2<sup>nd</sup> class – to which my own obvious temptation would be say “why, yes! Of course!”

But joking aside, saying, about that period beginning in May and going on for a couple of years, that it is an “interim” time invites you to adopt some form of hibernation as your core value! I recall being told that when, in 1996 my predecessor – generously believing that he was doing a good thing – told the vestry he would retire “in two years,” thereby unintentionally managed to put a lot of things on hold for a long time, because it was an “interim” period. One of those things set aside was the building program. At that meeting in 1996, the Building Committee was to make a presentation about starting a fund-raising program for a new parish hall. Not only did that presentation go by the wayside, it took more than 12 years before that the baton was picked up again. That's what happens if “interim” becomes your “go-to” word.

Back in 2009, when we knew we'd have to move out of the old parish office so that it could be demolished to make way for the building we now have, we decided to remodel the old shed out back. We asked for suggestions for a new name. We couldn't, after all, say that the office was “out in the shed”! And just calling it the office didn't seem to work either. We came up with a combination of Shed and Office – shoffice! People still call it that, and remember the vitality of the building program. Words matter!

All of which is to say that perhaps you should jettison that word “interim”! And with it, jettison the idea that you don't need to get involved; that “in the interim” others will pick up the slack. AND, jettison the temptation to be retrograde, to try and go back to the old ways of doing things, to the “halcyon days of yore” there were never halcyon, to old patterns that simply maintain the status-quo in the face of a world that's destroying the status quo at every opportunity. Let it go; in the Lenten spirit of letting go, let it go. Don't let ends dictate means; don't try to make others fall

into line with a future vision only you see; don't allow ego to get in the way of possibility.

And in the Celtic spirit of taking something on, spend this Lent finding a new word or phrase to describe what is to come in May. Words matter - the right one can make all the difference. I came up with a few in short order: Transition, Growth Time, Transformation Period, Hinge Moment – or any combination thereof.

Your journey of preparation began on Wednesday - you have the rest of Lent for reflection, and a week beyond that, before you need to move from reflection to action. Good luck and God's blessings on your journey.