



First United Church of Oak Park

Vulnerability is Not Very Tempting

Luke 4:1-13 (First Sunday in Lent)

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This past Wednesday – Ash Wednesday – we began another journey into the Lenten wilderness. The bible paints a picture of the wilderness for us as a place of reflection, wrestling, searching, discerning. This makes it the perfect setting for Lent, as Lent is a season of reflection. It is a place to encounter God or to be tempted, as is the case in this text for Jesus. But we have embarked on this Lenten journey with the theme of “take nothing with you.”

When you go on a journey or travel somewhere, are you a light packer? How many bags or suitcases do you bring? Even if you are a one carry-on type of person, this season we are asking you to travel with nothing – no suitcase of clothes, no cosmetic bag of toiletries, no multiple pairs of shoes, or snacks for the plane; just how Jesus sent out his disciples.

You may be asking yourself, “but what will I wear?” And are probably thinking, “I can’t travel like this, I’ll be too unprepared.” The thought of a journey like this might feel exciting to you or, maybe like me, this is anxiety-producing for you because it makes you feel vulnerable without bags to carry or stuff to hold.

But either way, there is a nakedness that comes with vulnerability and nakedness is shameful, right? At least that’s what Adam and Eve thought. But I’m not really talking about physical, literal nakedness; I’m talking about emotional nakedness and the willingness to lean into your anxiety and fears and risk shame, rejection, failure or whatever it is you fear, so that you can be seen, truly seen, for who you truly are. Stripping off the mask you wear or the façade you present.

In our scripture reading today, we meet Jesus at his most vulnerable: he is in the wilderness, has been for over a month, he is hungry, and the devil sees this as an opportune time to test Jesus by tempting him. Three times the devil attempts to corrupt Jesus! But he remains strong and refuses to give in to temptation or to be led astray.

But this sermon is not about how you should resist temptation to be like Jesus. We are human and imperfect, and I refuse to preach that you should do something that I cannot do or that is not possible by our nature. We all have given in to temptation and will again, so I want to shift the focus of this sermon and our focus in Lent, away from temptation.

Researcher-Storyteller, Brene Brown’s TED talk, titled “The Power of Vulnerability,” talks about how vulnerability is not only the core of shame and fear and our struggle for worthiness, but it also appears to be the birthplace of joy, creativity, love, and a sense of belonging. We live in a society and a world that does not value vulnerability, it is instead seen as a weakness.

So the logical response to vulnerability is to numb it. But we cannot selectively numb emotions. When we refuse to give into vulnerability or feel the emotions we fear or perceive as weakness, we are also numbing all

the good feelings and possible experiences of joy, gratitude, or happiness – and when we don't experience or feel any of these things we feel unfulfilled or as though we don't have purpose.

One of the most basic human needs is the need for connection. We strive for and seek connection with people, a tribe to which we can belong, a group of people who will make us feel seen and understood. And in order to do that we have to be willing to risk being vulnerable, we have to lean in to all that makes us uncomfortable, all the fears that we have, if we have any desire to experience the joy and happiness that comes with finding our tribe and a sense of belonging.

As you continue your journey into the Lenten wilderness this season, are you willing to take nothing with you? Not your ego or your insecurities, your mask or façade, or whatever emotional, physical or literal baggage you may be carrying? Are you willing leaving it all behind, willing to allow yourself to be vulnerable?

If you have the courage to wander the wilderness with vulnerability, as Jesus did, then you will be more open to encountering the divine. That doesn't mean that you won't come across obstacles, but you will be more open to making loving, authentic connections. And then, when you are truly yourself, allowing others to truly see you, temptation will seem like a footnote – something that barely crosses your radar because you will have overcome the biggest obstacle, yourself.

So, in your experience of the wilderness, I encourage you to not focus on the temptations you are trying to avoid, but rather focus on your practice of vulnerability. Here are some ways that you can do this: tell your story, love whole-heartedly, have compassion for yourself so that you will be better able to show compassion to others, remember that as human beings we are imperfect, but we are still worthy.

You are worthy, you are worthy of love and belonging. And tell yourself that you are enough – repeat it over and over. Let's do that now – repeat after me. I am enough. Amen.