

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"Who's in charge around here?"

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-17

Opening Hymn: This is my Father's world 328

Closing Hymn: It is well with my soul (insert)

Children's Hymn: Lead me, Jesus; I will follow 646

Choruses: Lord, I lift your name on high, The River

Rev. Steve Filyk

January 20, 2019

When I get up in the morning I flip through the paper.

Then later, after I drop my kids off at school

I listen to the CBC World Report podcast.

I like reading the newspaper.

You can pick and choose what you want to read,  
what articles you want to explore.

But I'm getting tired of that podcast.  
I feel like the headlines are always negative.

There's troubles renegotiating NAFTA.  
There's antagonism with China.  
There's a dive in the markets,

And then this week that terrorist attack in Kenya.

You probably saw the headlines.  
"Somali militants... stormed an upscale Nairobi hotel compound,  
taking at least 21 lives...  
forcing hundreds of people into terrifying escapes..."<sup>i</sup>

Sometimes these stories just wash over us.

But other times we realise  
That each of these stories  
Represents lives that have been broken and destroyed.

“Jason Spindler,  
who was among the 21 people murdered [in the attack]...  
had been late for work at the World Trade Center  
at the time of the 2001 atrocity.

The 40-year-old, from Houston, Texas,  
emerged from the subway when the first tower fell  
and was covered in dust and debris as he tried to help others...

Mr Spindler, who worked to grow businesses in emerging markets...  
joined the Peace Corps in Peru after the US attacks.

Speaking to NBC News, his mother said  
he "was trying to make positive change in the third world  
in emerging markets".<sup>ii</sup>

When you watch the news  
Or read the paper  
Or listen to a podcast,  
Do you ever wonder: “Who’s in charge around here?”

Do you ever feel that fear and despair  
Are taking root in your soul?

If we're not paying close attention to today's Scripture lesson  
the account temptation of Jesus  
might raise the same questions  
as those terrible new reports.

You'll recall that "For the third test,  
the Devil took [Jesus] to the peak of a huge mountain.

[That] He gestured expansively, pointing out all the earth's kingdoms,  
[and] how glorious they all were.

[And that] he said, "They're yours [Jesus]—lock, stock, and barrel.  
Just go down on your knees and worship me,  
and they're yours."<sup>iii</sup>

Here the Devil is claiming  
That the kingdoms of the earth are under HIS authority.

So are we really in the Devil's hands?

It would be dangerous to underestimate Satan.  
Those temptations he sets before Jesus  
Reveals that he has a keen awareness of human weakness.

In his first attempt to waylay Jesus  
The devil hones in on a hungry Jesus' need for nourishment.

"If you are the Son of God, [the devil taunts him]  
Tell these stones to become bread."

Ever tried to satisfy one of your basic needs  
Outside of God's good provision?  
Many of us have...

In his second attempt, the Devil tries to entice Jesus  
To take a dive off the Temple.  
This time the invitation is back up by Scripture.  
The Devil encourages Jesus quoting Psalm 91:

“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.”<sup>iv</sup>

Ever questioned God's provision?  
Ever wanted to force God's hand to prove his care?  
That's what the Devil is putting before Jesus

Finally the Devil goes for the knock-out.  
He tries to seduce Jesus with the promise of wealth and fame:

Showing him the splendor of the world, he promises:  
“All this I will give you...  
If you will [only] bow down and worship me.”

What would you give to be ruler of the earth,  
Let alone the owner of a few Tim Horton's franchises?  
This is what the Devil is offering to Jesus.

It is clear that the Devil is an expert  
In human weakness.

He challenges Jesus' fears about his basic needs,  
He raises questions about Jesus' safety and security.  
Then he appeals to Jesus' ambition  
Offering him clout and esteem.

And just in case Jesus is not some easy mark,  
The Devil throws in Scripture.  
He wants to 'help' Jesus justify meeting those human needs  
Without God.

This is some pretty serious testing.

To be honest, though, I think the greatest temptation for Jesus and us  
Is the temptation to believe that the Devil  
IS the one in charge around here.

The biggest temptation is to believe  
That the Devil has all that authority he claims,  
And then to respond with resignation and despair.  
If you can't beat 'em, you might as well join 'em.

It is dangerous to underestimate Satan.  
But we shouldn't give him too much credence either.

When you pay closer attention to today's reading...

When you look at Jesus' responses,  
When you look at the surrounding passage  
When you consider the entire Gospel of Matthew,

There is no escaping the reality that the Devil is a liar  
 And that despite the many that fall sway to him,  
 God stands firmly in charge.

We witness God's authority at the beginning of the lesson.  
 We are told that after Jesus' baptism  
 He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness  
 For this encounter with the Devil.

That's right, the Devil didn't spring this match on Jesus;  
 God scheduled the fight.

We witness God's control  
 in Jesus' responses to each of the Devil's enticements.

Jesus meets each temptation with a word from the Bible.  
 And he isn't thrown off when the Devil starts twisting Scripture.

We see God's authority in the fact that the Devil leaves Jesus  
 After this encounter.  
 The loser leaves when he hasn't found a foothold.

God's authority is further shown  
 When angels appear to minister to Jesus  
 After the end of this battle

as well Jesus' determination to launch his ministry.  
 Jesus isn't afraid of what he's seen.

He preaches boldly:

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."<sup>v</sup>

But if this doesn't strike you as a bold enough statement  
of the sovereignty of God,  
just flip to the end of Matthew's Gospel,  
After the crucifixion and resurrection.

So who's in charge around here?  
Who has authority?

Jesus tells his disciples:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.  
Therefore go and make disciples of all nations..."<sup>vi</sup>

If you spend a lot of time listening to the headlines  
You might start believing the Devil has a firm hold on this world.  
A quick reading of today's Scripture  
might confirm this conviction.

But when you read the whole passage you'll soon realise  
"The point Matthew is making  
has to do with [demonstrating that Jesus is the victor],

the Savior from Satan's realm of darkness  
who can provide rescue to struggling mortals  
because he has faced what we face  
and defeated what would otherwise defeat us."<sup>vii</sup>

When I was sketching this sermon,  
I thought I'd close with a story from Martin Luther  
Who has famously recorded some of his encounters  
With the Devil.

Instead I found this astonishing story from a lesser-known pastor  
Who was commenting on the famous reformer.  
A story of his own encounter with a devil.

In his own words:

It was during a very challenging time  
in one of my previous pastorates.

I was experiencing a sleepless night  
and restlessly pacing about the house while the family slept.

I settled down in the recliner in our living room,  
when suddenly, I found myself in a zone  
that I can only explain as seemingly a place  
between sleep and being awake...

I was wide awake and my senses heightened, but I could not move.

My eyes spied a shadowy humanoid figure  
in the corner of the room.

The entity exuded the purest form of hate  
and cursed me with a profanity so coarse and filthy  
that it was somewhat nauseating.

Nothing told me so, but I knew that this was a devil – a demon.

The demon said that he had followed me throughout my life  
and recounted a number of occasions when I nearly died  
and took credit for them.



Most dreadful, when this devil spoke to me from across the room,  
I could feel it's breath on my ear.

"I have failed again and again to destroy you,  
but I will kill you.

I will get you yet," he said to me several times.

Then there came a calming and gentle voice, which instructed:  
"Rebuke him in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ  
and he will leave you." So I did.

Immediately the devil was gone and I could move again –  
no longer was I suspended in a trance-like state.

I know that it's a fantastic story – an unbelievable one.

Some will [hear] this and [say] I am a fool of fools – a nut-job.

Some will be more sophisticated  
and claim it was a nervous break-down of sorts.

Nonetheless, I know that it was real –  
as real as any other experience in my life.

I was in an unseen place where forces of light and darkness do battle –  
another dimension where powers work behind the scenes  
to affect life's events.

That same night, deeply troubled by what I had seen, felt and heard,  
I begged God in prayer for an answer  
as to why in his providence he would allow me  
to go through such a terrible experience.

"What does it all mean, Lord?" I fervently asked.

"Why, Lord?" I said.

"Why, in your purpose, did you order such a horror for me?"

The answer would come as the day was dawning.

This time there was no voice,

neither a heavenly angel to deliver the message,

just a sweet and peaceful impression

I knew was the Spirit of God, telling me:

"You are afraid of so much that you can see,

but there are more fearful things around you

which cannot be seen that mean you harm.

Just as I kept that demon at bay in the corner of the room

and would not allow him to touch you;

just as I limited the power of that same devil

who orchestrated by previous events to slay you;

I am with you now as then

and will not allow evil to put its hands on you,

except as it may do you good, glorify my name,

and advance my kingdom.

Stop being afraid! ...Instead, trust me.

Fear me alone, for I am sovereign in everything."

That night [he continued]

was a watershed moment in my life and ministry.

It was a turning point from anxiety and fear to faith.

Since that time, in my pastoral role  
 and my work as a Christian activist,  
 when speaking the truth,  
 I have faced some of the most disconcerting of moments –  
 threats to my person – harassing phone calls –  
 hate mail – powerful angry legislators  
 wagging their fingers in my face –  
 hecklers and chanters at speaking engagements...

But none have ever come close  
 to being as awful as the wicked entity  
 I faced that night a few years ago...

There shall always be attempts by Satan and his minions  
 to frustrate the plan of God.  
 Nevertheless, God's will can never ultimately be defeated.”<sup>viii</sup>

May we live with the confidence  
 That “thought the wrong seems oft so strong,  
 God is the ruler yet.”<sup>ix</sup>

Amen

---

<sup>i</sup> KATHARINE HOURELD AND DUNCAN MIRIRI “Attack on Nairobi hotel leaves at least 21 dead as government declares siege over” *The Globe and Mail* [www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-attack-on-nairobi-hotel-leaves-14-dead-as-government-declares-siege/](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-attack-on-nairobi-hotel-leaves-14-dead-as-government-declares-siege/)

<sup>ii</sup> “US businessman Jason Spindler who survived 9/11 killed in Kenya terror attack” January 18, 2019 SkyNews [news.sky.com/story/us-businessman-jason-spindler-who-survived-911-killed-in-kenya-terror-attack-11609518](http://news.sky.com/story/us-businessman-jason-spindler-who-survived-911-killed-in-kenya-terror-attack-11609518)

<sup>iii</sup> Matthew 4:8-9 MSG

<sup>iv</sup> See Psalm 91:11,12

<sup>v</sup> Matthew 4:17 NIV

<sup>vi</sup> Matthew 28:18 NIV

<sup>vii</sup> F. Dean Lueking “First Sunday in Lent, Year A; Matthew 4:1-11” *The Lectionary Commentary: the Gospels* 20

<sup>viii</sup> Dr. Mark Creech “The Night the Demon Visited” May 14, 2013 *The Christian Post* <https://www.christianpost.com/news/the-night-the-demon-visited.html>

<sup>ix</sup> “This is my Father’s world” words by Maltbie D. Babcock