

Some of y'all already know,
that I was an English major in college.
Graduated right across the street,
and several of my former professors,
are parishioners here.

Let me tell you,
it's infinitely more intimidating
preaching in front of them,
than it was preaching in front
of seminary professors.

That might be because I heard
my seminary professors preach,
and well, we all have different gifts.

Anyway,
I didn't start out as an English major;
I knew I wanted to go to seminary,
so I chose psychology,
which seemed like a good idea
at the time,
But I'm glad I switched -
nothing against any psych majors
in the congregation;
it's a fine field, and needed
but here's what all those
English classes did for me -

They taught me how to read;
I know, we learned to read
long before college,
but they taught me how
to approach a text,
as a text,
before we start trying
to figure out what that text
might mean.

If you ever come to a Bible Study,
that I lead,
you're probably gonna get tired
of hearing me say -

What does the text say?

I'm telling you,
I'll ask that question,
and people will jump into,

"Well he's talking about..."
or "I think he means..."
and I'm like,

No. What does it say?

It's like we have forgotten how
to read the Bible like that,
We read a passage,
and then will swear that it says,
what someone else told us it means.

I always, always want to start,
with what the text actually says.
Astonishing what you can pick up,
when you just read what's there,
Before you start trying
to read into it what's not.

Take our Gospel lesson for today -
It's the first Sunday in Lent,
so the Gospel reading is always
the Temptation of
Jesus in the Wilderness.

And by the way,
because it's year A,
the OT for today is the story
of The Fall - of Adam and Eve's
disobedience in the Garden -
and speaking of Temptation,

I was soooo tempted,
to bypass the Gospel,
because there is sooooo much,
that the Genesis story says -

It's too bad our liturgy
doesn't allow for two sermons,
I'll have to save that one
for another time.

But turning back to the Gospel,
Matthew tells us of three
temptations that Jesus faces -

If he is hungry,
as he surely must be,
turn these stones to bread.

See if God will protect you,
from the top of His Holy House,
jump, and let the angels catch you.

Do you want the world and its glory?
I will give it to you
for free, without a fight,
if you will only acknowledge me
Come one,
no one's around
No one will even know.

Jesus has wonderful
responses to all these
offerings, drawn right
from the words of Scripture.

In fact,
he fends off the temptations
so quickly, so effortlessly,
that you wonder
if he were really tempted -
was that the best,
the enemy could do.

And that's why we need
to read the text carefully -
because what does it actually say?

What does the tempter,
*first say to Jesus?

IF you are the Son of God,
Command these stones
to become bread.

IF you are the Son of God,
throw yourself down.

The adversary doesn't
tempt Jesus with mere food,
or even power or glory -
he comes at what seems
to be his real weakness -

Is he sure that he is,
who he thinks he is,
who he hopes he is?
What if he's wrong?

This question, this doubt
seems to stay with him -
later on, he'll ask his disciples,
Who do people say that I am,

And when he hears their answers -
some say John the Baptist,
or Elijah,
or one of the prophets,

It makes his next question
all the more poignant -
but what about you -
who do you say that I am?

Thank God for Peter
and his answer.

And the desert today,
isn't the last time Jesus
will hear someone say this to him.

If you are the Son of God,
come down from the cross,
save yourself,
and us.

I think this is the real temptation,
and it's a good one,
as it followed Jesus all of his life.

Why does that matter?

It does for me,
because I need to know
that his temptations were real,
that his suffering was real,
that his life here,
as one of us,
was real.

If Jesus struggled to believe
he was the Son of God,
I think we sometimes struggle
to understand that he was also
the Son of Mary -

By that I mean,
That he really was human,
not just divine,
that he knows what it is
to be one of us,
because he has been
one of us.

He didn't just look like us,
He ^{*}was us,
with everything it means,
to be human.

I don't know about you,

But that's the kind of Savior
I need,
who has taken ^{*}on all that
we are,
that He might redeem
and ^{*}save all that we are.

No matter where we have been,
he has been there, too.
No matter where we may
find ourselves next,
He was there before us.

Without that,
without the fullness of His humanity,
without the depth of His temptation,

the Cross is robbed of its power,
and Death still holds sway.

Without the humanity of Jesus,
His divinity doesn't change us,
it doesn't reach down to our depths.

That's why today's Gospel story
matters so much.
We hold to the truth of this story
in the wilderness,
as much as we do to the story
of Bethlehem,
or Jerusalem,
of Calvary.

They are all part
of the one story of salvation,
the story of The Word made Flesh,
of the Son of God,
and the Son of Mary,
who, for our sake,
came to be what we are,
with all our doubts, and
uncertainties,
and frailties

That we might become
more than we were,
That we might share
the Divine Life of the one
who humbled himself to share
in our humanity.