

February 26, 2023  
The First Sunday in Lent  
Year A  
Matthew 4:1-11  
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Norwood, MA  
Pastor Amanda L. Warner

### The Test

Amelia, have you ever heard...of Eduard Christoff Phillipe Gerard Renaldi?

No.

He was the crown prince of Genovia.

Hmm. What about him?

Eduard Christoff Phillipe Gerard Renaldi...was your father.

[Snorts] Yeah, sure.

My father was the prince of Genovia.

Uh-huh. You're joking.

Why would I joke about something like that?

No! Because if he's really a prince, then I--

Exactly. You're not just Amelia Thermopolis.

You are Amelia Mignonette Thermopolis Renaldi...

Princess of Genovia.

Me? A princess? Shut up!

The scene I just quoted is from the 2001 Disney movie, The Princess Diaries. It's the scene where Mia Thermopolis, an ordinary girl, who considers herself to be awkward and geeky, finds out that she is a princess and heir to the throne of a small European country called Genovia. And for much of the

beginning of the movie, she is not pleased. Her goal in life is to blend into the background, not to be noticed; to fit in with her tiny group of friends, and to be ignored by the rest of the world. This is what she says when she begins to realize the implications of her royal status:

Rule? Oh, no.

Oh, no. No, no, no.

Now you have really got the wrong girl.

I never lead anybody--

not at Brownies, not at Camp Fire Girls--

Queen Clarisse, my expectation in life is to be invisible,  
and I'm good at it.

In order to understand today's gospel reading, you have to realize that the church year has taken us back in time. Well, I guess that it always does that. What I mean is that it has taken us back in Jesus' timeline. Last week, when we celebrated the Transfiguration of Our Lord, we found Jesus well established in his three year public ministry. He has disciples, his 12 closest friends and co-workers in his ministry. He has had many extraordinary and miraculous moments in his work; preaching to huge crowds, feeding thousands with five loaves and two fish, healing droves of people, casting out demons, winning debates with religious leaders, and then, of course, there was last week's event on the mountain, when he was transfigured, his face glowing, his clothes blindingly white, and being visited by two of the central figures of his faith, Moses and Elijah. In last week's gospel reading, Jesus had

no reason to be unsure about who it was, the Son of the Most High God, and what he was called to do.

But today's gospel reading takes us backwards in Jesus' timeline to the time right after Jesus was baptized.

That too, was an affirming and confirming moment. Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River and as he came up out of the water, the heavens opened around him, the Spirit of God descended on him, and he heard a voice from heaven saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

We don't know how much the fully human and fully divine Jesus truly knew and understood about who he was and what he was in the world to do prior to that moment, but at that moment, if he had had any doubts then they were probably cleared up. He knew who he was, the Son of God, the Beloved One, the child of the king above all kings.

What happens immediately after that is what we have for our gospel reading for today.

It's very different from what happens to Mia in [The Princess Diaries](#) after she finds out that she is a princess. In the movie, Mia starts getting driven around in limousines. She gets a princess makeover and starts taking princess lessons, learning how to comport herself as the next ruler of her country.

What happens to Jesus, upon either learning or having it confirmed that he is the Son of God is that the very same Spirit of God who confirmed his identity takes him to the wilderness when he fasts and is tempted.

The forty-day season of Lent is based on Jesus' forty day fast in the wilderness, which is why we have this story today, on the First Sunday in Lent

rather than on the Sunday after the Sunday when our gospel reading is the one about Jesus' baptism.

During Jesus' time in the wilderness, he learns, if he didn't know it already, and certainly we learn, that Jesus' life as the beloved Son of God is not going to be the first century equivalent to limousines and parties and dance lessons and makeovers. Because what happens at the end of Jesus' forty days in the wilderness is that, once he is famished from his fasting, he is tempted by the devil, the tempter, the one who whispers in his ear, basically, that what God has given him isn't and will never be enough.

It starts with a basic temptation to one who is hungry, turn these stones to bread.

That temptation is followed by the temptation to test God, to see if God will protect his beloved Son if Jesus will just throw himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple.

Both of these temptations include a dig at Jesus' identity. "If you are the Son of God..."

If you are, if you really are, you'll be able to do it. The implication is that if he doesn't, if he refuses, then maybe he's not who he believes he is, who he thinks he is. Maybe the devil whispers in his ear, that whole baptism thing was just a hallucination, giving you delusions of grandeur.

The resistance that Jesus shows here is the resistance to use the devil's criteria to prove himself. He seeks neither the devil's confirmation nor his own to believe he is who God says he is.

Finally, the devil tempts Jesus with the idea that he can give Jesus more than God can give him. He takes Jesus up to a high mountain and shows him

the splendor of the kingdoms of the world and says, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”

Perhaps it would have been reasonable for Jesus to think that, as the Beloved Son of God, he should have had the worship of all of the kingdoms of the world. But, his time in the wilderness might have persuaded him, if he didn't already know, that his path would not be one of immediate glory, of life in a palace, of the nations of the world kneeling at his feet. He would not have what the sons of other monarchs of the world had.

But one thing that Jesus knew was that he would have something better. He would have a relationship with his king, God, and father that was unlike anything that had ever been seen in the world before. The things that God had given him already, and had promised him, in his birth, in the words of scripture, maybe in his childhood, and maybe in his time fasting in the wilderness, which, spirit-led as it was, might have given him visions and promises of what it meant to be the Beloved Son that were more than any of the kingdoms of the world and their splendors.

Jesus' time of temptation was a time for him to reaffirm that he was who the Spirit said that he was, the beloved Son, and that he trusted in God his father and king.

Sometimes we're faced with the same kinds of temptations that Jesus faced. “If you are God's child, if God really loves you, if God is really real,” or “if you love God enough” then shouldn't you be living like a prince or princess? Shouldn't you be healthy, wealthy, successful? Shouldn't everything in your life be working out? Shouldn't that be the test that God passes in order for you to remain faithful?

Sometimes the test or temptation that we face is the temptation of putting the Lord our God to the test, demanding outcomes, expecting what the world says that we should get, rather than what God promises.

But in those moments when we're tempted to stumble, to doubt, to struggle, to wonder what it truly means to be God's child, we can do what Jesus did. We can lean on God's words in scripture, like Jesus did. We can even lean on this story when Jesus was tempted. And we can trust that God's love is with us, in our times of temptations, in those times when we prevail over temptation, and even those times when we give in. For God has spoken over us that we too, are beloved children of our God and king. We are claimed as God's own, God's beloved and forgiven children. Jesus stands as an example and gives us a crown of righteousness, and the Spirit guides us and gives us strength. Amen.