

Sermon  
Lent 1-C  
St. Andrew's, Methuen  
March 6, 2022  
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Deuteronomy 26:1-11  
Romans 10:8b-13  
Luke 4:1-13  
Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

How many of your high school classmates did you stay in touch with? At my 50<sup>th</sup> high school reunion three years ago, it was obvious I had not kept in touch with any of them.

I had a few close friends in my class, but after graduation in 1969, I was looking only to the future. In a few months I would go off to the University of Georgia where my future would really take off.

I even broke up with my high school sweetheart—my first true love—in part because I knew there were going to be thousands of beautiful, smart, women at the University of Georgia, who would be captivated by my electric self. (Which, oddly, they weren't).

One of the gifts of youth is this mindset of looking toward the future with energy and excitement: **what do I want to do? Who do I want to become?**

The seeds of this future self are planted in us by our parents, church, culture and nation. For instance, growing up in Philadelphia Tony Campolo saw how parents contributed to his future self: Every morning heading out the door for school his Italian mother would call out "Tony, do you have your lunch?", while his Jewish friend's mother would call out, "Jacob, do you have your books?"

Jacob became a doctor and Tony became overweight.

These images from family and society lure us into the future, pulling us along into finding our better, truer selves. Children raised in healthy households and cultures are blessed by images that empower them to be the best that they can be.

Children from dysfunctional households and broken cultures, are often misshapen by the destructive images that are forced upon them. For example, if you are raised in a racist culture in which most people think people like you are second-class, you will internalize those images, believing them to be true.

Because none of us escapes receiving images that warp us, all of us must struggle with who we want to be, experimenting with which images we want to follow and which images we need to leave behind.

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Jesus also needed to struggle with which images he would follow into the future. Luke tells us that at age 12 Jesus runs off from Mary and Joseph in the temple to talk to the religious leaders in order to get their help in clarifying who his future self should become. **After that encounter, Luke writes that Jesus goes back with his parents to Nazareth and he grows in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and others.**

Now, 18 years later Jesus receives the baptism of John and is filled with **the Holy Spirit who leads him into the wilderness to clarify what kind of person God is calling him to be.**

**His struggle is around the question of what does it mean to claim God as Father and thus live as God's son.** Jesus must sift through scripture to learn who God truly is and so he can see more clearly how to be a true member of God's family.

And evil is right there, as it always is, to suggest to Jesus false images to follow.

The devil says, **"If you are God's son"**, ease your own hunger now by turning these stones into bread."

The devil says, **"If you are God's son** who is supposed to lead the world, worship me and I'll put you in charge without delay."

The devil says, **"If you are God's son**, jump off the temple and prove to God and the people how faithful you are."

All these images of a future self will provide Jesus **with the physical strength, the political power, and the religious authority to be an effective son of God. And there is nothing wrong with any of these.**

The problem is with the kind of person he needs to become to attain them: will he be a person who reflects the image **of Caesar** or the image **of Father-Mother God?**

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And that's the question for each of us, as we consider what kind of person God is luring us to become.

We have all been baptized into Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit **and revealed as daughters and sons of God, yet** each day we decide how to manifest that reality in the world.

Shall securing comfort, power over others, and religious authority be our priorities?

**Or shall we make the same choice Jesus makes?** It is interesting to note that Jesus's favorite title for himself wasn't "son of God", but "son of Man" as when he says "**The Son of Man** did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Therefore, Jesus will make bread, not for himself but for the 5000 on the hillside.

Jesus will gain power over his enemies, not through political power, but through sacrificial love.

Jesus does a mighty act at the temple, not through religious grandstanding, but by a prophetic action claiming it as a house of prayer for all people.

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Most of us here today are of an age where we are tempted to spend our time looking behind us instead of ahead of us: on the cruise ship of life, we are at the stern railing looking with both longing and regret into the long ago and far away.

And there is no sin in trying to come to terms with our past. Until we get stuck there. Young 17-year-old Rose climbs the stern railing of the Titanic to jump into the frigid North Sea, because she can't imagine a future self worth becoming.

But young Jack coaxes Rose back into life by showing her that there is a future out there full things she dreams of when she sleeps.

**We know Rose is choosing life when she climbs out onto the bow railing and spreads her arms to embrace God's future for her life. I know it's only Hollywood, but the gospel shines through all things.**

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Whether we are 19 or 90, if we would live into our true selves as God's daughters and sons, we must resist the temptation to live only looking backwards and to get to the front of the ship to open our hearts to embrace our future self, still being constructed into the image of Christ.