

“Seeking: Who Will You Listen to?”
Matthew 4:1-11

As we consider the importance of being intentional about choosing the voices we listen to, a scene from the movie “Barbie” comes to mind. It is about the social pressures through voices that speak so loudly to women about unattainable beauty and behavior standards. Here is the speech by the character Gloria, who is the only female employee at the doll company. She inspires all the dolls to hear a different voice about their worth, other than that of patriarchy, the worldview that promotes oppressing women and seeing them as lesser than men: <https://youtu.be/CBqIDWHkdHk>

Here is the text of the monologue:

“It is literally impossible to be a woman. You are so beautiful, and so smart, and it kills me that you don't think you're good enough. Like, we have to always be extraordinary, but somehow we're always doing it wrong.

You have to be thin, but not too thin. And you can never say you want to be thin. You have to say you want to be healthy, but also you have to be thin. You have to have money, but you can't ask for money because that's crass. You have to be a boss, but you can't be mean. You have to lead, but you can't squash other people's ideas. You're supposed to love being a mother, but don't talk about your kids all the...time. You have to be a career woman but also always be looking out for other people.

You have to answer for men's bad behavior, which is insane, but if you point that out, you're accused of complaining. You're supposed to stay pretty for men, but not so pretty that you tempt them too much or that you threaten other women because you're supposed to be a part of the sisterhood.

But always stand out and always be grateful. But never forget that the system is rigged. So find a way to acknowledge that but also always be grateful.

You have to never get old, never be rude, never show off, never be selfish, never fall down, never fail, never show fear, never get out of line. It's too hard! It's too contradictory and nobody gives you a medal or says thank you! And it turns out in fact that not only are you doing everything wrong, but also everything is your fault. I'm just so tired of watching myself and every single other woman tie herself into knots so that people will like us. And if all of that is also true for a doll just representing women, then I don't even know.”

The voice of temptation about our true identity and worth as children of God is often questioned and manipulated by the many voices around us. Jesus gives us an incredible example of how to stay grounded in God's voice of love, despite the voices of temptation that are all around and sometimes even inside us.

Jesus' journey into the wilderness shows us how the voices of temptation are always with us. Even Jesus, who was supposed to be so blessed and so grounded in love was not exempt from the challenges that face us as human beings. We cannot escape hearing the voices of temptation. What we can do is to learn how to listen more deeply to the voice of love.

After his baptism, Jesus went into an intense time in the wilderness alone to be tested. He had a lot going on. He had a mission to accomplish. He had people to save. He had a lot riding on his ministry, and instead of jumping into active ministry, Jesus took the time for intense prayer and fasting. This may seem so counterintuitive because we may think that avoiding temptation is the way to go. The only problem with that scenario is that the voices of temptation are part of the human experience no matter what we do.

After declaring to the world that he was the one to bring a new way of reform for his people, he was led by the Spirit to do his inner work. (read Matthew 4:1-11) As a side note, it is important for our understanding of the story to look at the meaning of the word "Satan" in the text. Whenever the word Satan or devil appears, we are trained through popular culture to think of evil and the powers of evil in the world. But in the biblical tradition, the role of Satan ("Ha Satan" in Hebrew) was that of an adversary or a tempter. He was seen as part of God's court who had the function of making sure that all perspectives are represented or at least that the other side of the argument is considered. So "the adversary" is more of a role than a name. One biblical scholar puts it this way, "The satan is an ally of God who tests the Creation to determine its soundness, a cosmic building inspector who enforces the Universal Building Code. In later stories and later religious imagination, the satan becomes Satan, the enemy of God, Creation, and all that is good and life-giving. The figure who appears in Matthew's story is somewhere in between." I think that this is an important piece for us as we consider the story because it is easy to see Jesus rejecting the temptations of the Satan if it was clear to him that he was facing the "devil." But if we are true to the text and its context, then we can see that the voice of temptation for Jesus was more subtle which is truer to life for all of us. We are rarely faced with voices that are clearly evil. These voices of temptations are often subtle or seem innocuous: Don't you want to look pretty? Don't you want to be successful? Don't you want to fit in? Don't you want to make your family proud of you? Don't you want to feel safe?

Let's listen to how Jesus handled these temptations according to Matthew 4:1-11
 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.³The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴But he answered, "It is written,

'One does not live by bread alone,
 but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,'

and 'On their hands they will bear you up,
 so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

⁷Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

‘Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.’”

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

The tricky thing that Jesus faced was that the tempter used scriptures to tempt Jesus. The voice and the words would have been familiar to Jesus. This shows us that the temptations which Jesus faced were subtle and even used Bible verses to deliver their message. Think of the many times people use the Bible to justify hate and fear.

I loved that in every instant, Jesus resorted to another voice of authority on life, the voice that was deep within him which enabled him to know that even the words of the Bible could be misused. This was the voice of God’s love which helped Jesus read the Bible through the filter of love. The words of scripture he used were stored in a deep place in Jesus’ heart and soul. They welled up in him just when he needed them. When the first temptation of the voice of security and survival came to Jesus, he knew that God’s love can be trusted, even if life does not go our way and when we face hardships. When the voice of control that is driven by fear came his way, he knew that control was only an illusion, and that trust was the way to go in life. When the temptation about esteem came to him, he knew that God’s love was more than enough for him.

There is great wisdom in memorizing stories and scriptures that help us know the voice of God’s love so that when the voices of hate, doubt, and fear face us, we can lean on the deep reservoir of love that is deep within us. It is also essential for us to discern the voices because sometimes even scriptures can be used to tempt us away from the path of God’s love.

In the art piece for this week, there is a great reflection by Lisle Gwynn Garrity.



In this image, the words of the Tempter hover in the background. The Tempter's voice lingers like a ringing in Jesus' ears, saying: "Take charge. Hoard your power. Dominate. Control." Somehow, Jesus has deciphered that these words are simply background noise. He closes his eyes and goes inward, wrapping himself in a posture of self-embrace. From this introspective perspective, Jesus essentially says, "Get behind me, Satan." The backdrop of this piece resembles the dust of the desert. Like sand washing along a beach, the sediment shifts into water in the top left, hinting at what bolsters Jesus in his ministry: his belonging to God. His belovedness washes over him, giving him the courage to defy the deception of the Tempter and tune into his inner wisdom. In this way, he is given a new song to carry with him, a lullaby from God that goes, "You, my child, in you, I am well-pleased." This is a melody for singing, a song for dancing. What are the voices that linger with you like a ringing in your ears? What are the messages that try to deceive or devour you? Let those voices buzz and fade into the background. Close your eyes, tune in, and embrace yourself. From your belovedness, what song will you sing?

There is a Wonder Wall which you may use to share your reflections or ask more questions. Part of the work of this journey is to stay open and curious. Nothing hinders us more than when we get locked into a set of beliefs or practices in life. You may go to the wall after communion and ponder the question for this week: Who Will You Listen to?

We will end with our song for Lent: In the Land of the Seeking.

[The Land of the Seeking Music Video \(PREVIEW VERSION\) on Vimeo](#)