

What Translation Are You Reading?

Luke 4:1-13

I love leftovers.

You know there's nothing like

Sunday night's chicken tetrazzini on Tuesday.

And on the rare occasion

that I don't finish my meal at a restaurant,

I love restaurant leftovers.

The problem with me and leftovers though

is they don't last long.

If that Blue Cheese Burger was too much for me to finish

and I bring it home in that nifty Styrofoam box

—it's like Alice in Wonderland

is talking from inside my fridge—

eat me, eat me, eat me, is all I can hear.

Leftovers in Styrofoam and Pyrex dishes do not last long.

The temptation is too strong.

I am easily overcome.

So I can't imagine how Jesus felt

after 40 days of no food—

when Satan comes tempting him to turn the stones into bread.

Do you think Jesus's first response

(like the one that wasn't recorded)

was something like,

"Well don't you think

I've already thought of that Satan?"

And while we're being creative,

I'd rather call the devil/Satan, something like Stan

because when we read "devil" or "Satan"

we've already made the jump

to the red suit and pitchfork.

But devil here is more *the ha-Satan,*

the appointed accuser,

the court tempter, the divine sifter.

Let's picture Satan as Stan,
Maybe like Stan from the 70's
—definitely that bushy mustache and polyester leisure suit
and a stance that says
'you never know what I'm up to.'

So, Jesus and Stan are together in the wilderness
which isn't so much the Sahara Desert;
as much as it is the place
where the Israelites meet God.

Remember the story when they fled from Egypt?
Wilderness is where there was a pillar of fire
and a cloud of smoke.

The wilderness is where Elijah runs
from Ahab's corrupt prophets of Baal
and holes up in a cave to hide
only to unexpectedly encounter God in
the sound of sheer silence.

Wilderness is the place where John baptizes Jesus
and the heavens split open,
and a voice from heaven
declares Jesus as God's Son.

Strange things happen in the wilderness.

This encounter between Jesus and Satan
is among that *strain of strangeness*.
But wilderness is also a place where we meet God.

The devil, Stan launches three clever traps at Jesus
that I want you to know
—you and I step into all the time.

You see, it turns out, Stan, reads his bible.

Not just like once in a while either.
But must have read it well enough to know
what it says.

He can quote it to prove a point.

And if the devil can do that,
well I think we should be able to as well.
It is embarrassing when Christians
misquote scripture;
it is embarrassing when we seem like
we have no idea what we are talking about.

There are these videos
a camera crew asks random folks
questions we should all know the answers to.
For instance, they did this on the campus of Texas Tech
and started with the question,
Who won the Civil War?— some of the answers were
*the south
*you mean the one in 1965
*America
*who was in it and I'll tell you
*the confederates, right?

One person in the video guessed *the Union*.

And I would hope most of us
if we ever get stopped on the street and get asked,
'what is the first book of the Bible?',
we could all respond with: (Genesis);
or 'who was the mother of Jesus?'—(Mary)
or 'who built the ark?', (Noah)

I'm lobbing some easy ones at you, wink, wink.

I'm not up here to make you feel guilty
about your biblical knowledge or to cause you shame.

Tripp and I took an online quiz on last Sunday afternoon
that tests our Jewish knowledge...
this is what it is like to be married to me.
He got one more correct than I did,

but I'm sure it was pure beginners luck
as he was guessing the answers.

But perhaps a challenge to us beginning in Lent
is to be familiar enough with our sacred text
so that we won't look like
college students from Texas Tech.

'Cause here's the thing
—remember I said that the devil launches
three clever traps for Jesus
and we step in them all the time?

Well here in this story,
the tempter uses a very clever method
to try and get at the heart of Jesus's identity.
Stan here, knows the story of our scripture
and knows how to present
in a way that turns things around.

The clever traps are laid at our feet all the time.

First after fasting for 40 days,
Jesus is hungry.
So Satan the tempter says,
“Since”—and that is what Paul Achteemeier says
we should translate that word,
not *if you are the Son of God*, but since¹—
*“Since you are the Son of God,
command this stone to become a loaf of bread.”*

Remember the story of bread in the wilderness?
How the people were hungry
and cried out to Moses
to cry out to God
and God provided manna, bread, in the wilderness?

¹ Mark D. Davis, Left Behind and Loving It <http://leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com/2013/02/twice-led-not-fed-well-read.html>

Remember how God provided food
for God's hungry people?

Yeah the tempter knew that too.

So since God provided

a bunch of whiny Hebrews with food,

surely the Son of God stood a good chance
of getting some bread in the wilderness too, right?

Stan knows that Jesus is God's son;

knows that with just a word,

the heavens and earth were created.

So use that power, Son of God,

all you have to do Jesus, is speak,

command these stones to become bread and they will.

Someone's been reading their Bible.

And that someone acknowledges that Jesus as the Son,

acknowledges that identity should hold certain power.

Next, I imagine that in his famished state,

Jesus is weak, both from not having eaten

and being hounded by the devil 40 days.

So the next temptation is look,

you might be weakened but let's talk about real strength.

'Here are all the kingdoms of the world,

to you I will give their glory and all authority,

for it has been given to me,

and I can give it to anyone I choose

—if you will simply worship me it will be yours.'

Remember how the book of Job

opens with God gathering the heavenly court

and asking the tempter what he has been doing,

and the response is,

going to and fro, throughout the earth

and walking on it? (Job 1:6-7)

Someone knows the story of the scriptures.

When the devil says that he will give the authority and glory

of these kingdoms, or empires

to Jesus in exchange for worship,
he is saying
that strength is in might and authority.
strength is power over others.
Your identity hold strength and might, O Son of God.

And perhaps in a last ditch effort,
the devil takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple
—the holiest place in the land—
precisely where it is thought that God dwells
—there the devil says,
'Since you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here
(and then he quotes scripture)
for it is written :
'He will command his angels concerning you,
to protect you' and
'On their hand they will bear you up
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'
Someone has been memorizing the Psalms.

Now you might be thinking,
these temptations sound like hunger,
power and security;
and yes I've been tempted by those things
so I get that I am supposed to rely on God, Heather.
Well good.
You are supposed to trust and rely on God.
But I don't think that is the trap that is laid.
It is sneakier than that.

These temptations are geared to the heart
of Jesus's identity.
Each temptation that the devil brings,
involves Jesus's identity as found in the sacred story;
these temptations all want Jesus

to use his status and power as the Son of God
in self-serving ways.²

This is what we must watch out for

—when we are tempted to use our scriptures
in a self-centered way.

When we do that,

it robs us of our identity
as children of God;

as disciples and followers of Jesus;

as apostles, those who are sent out

in the power of the Holy Spirit do participate in God's work.

Have you ever noticed picky and choosy

we are when it comes to scripture?

How so often when *we want* to support a cause,

and I think this is across the board,

that we can pull scripture to support whatever we want?

Follow political leaders or protest them?

There's scripture for that.

Is global warming something to worry about

or is this world ours and we can use it how we choose?

There's a scripture for that.

I wish I could tell you that I'm above

being that picky and choosy,

but I'm not.

I too, fall in the trap of using scripture

as a self-serving tool to define my identity.

I am just as guilty and will use an agenda

rather than the person of Christ

to help me get my point across.

The devil knows who Jesus is.

Knows he is the Son of God.

And as the Son of God,

² <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/02/lent-1-c-identity-theft/>

the tempter wants Jesus
to put that power on display.
Command the stones to become bread;
not because there are 5,000 hungry people
gathered to hear you teach,
but because YOU are hungry, right now.
See the difference?

Worship me and I'll give you control
of all the world's empires,
not because you came into the world
to be a servant
but because power through domination
of others is the way to rule.
See the difference?

Throw yourself down on the rocks
because God won't let anything bad happen to ***you***
—but in reality Christ is the incarnation of God among us,
the one who is willing to face pain and death
in order show the world
that the ultimate power,
is not violence, not in greed,
not self-preservation not even in death
the ultimate power is self-giving LOVE.

Satan is tempting Jesus
to use his identity
in self-serving ways.
And he's doing it by knowing the story of God
well enough to twist it
to self serving ends.

And we are tempted to do the same all the time.
The devil is reading the same Bible we are!
He knows the stories of God's covenant
and steadfast love!
But he is clever enough to twist it all around
and have it be a story that serves us
rather than a story of unsurpassable love

that came to serve
that we are invited to join in with.

There's a story about a small town
with two wonderful churches.

Both of the churches had vibrant ministries
and wonderful pastors.

Most of the families in this town
were poor working class folks,
with lots of pride in their work ethic
and lots of pride in their church.

Then one family with lots of money
decided to donate their mother's estate
as stipulated in her will, to the ministry of God.
So the governing bodies of both churches
came together with their pastors
to talk about ways to use the money.

Lots of suggestions came forward.

But as ideas were crossed off
and it came down to a deciding vote—things got heated.
“A new community center
is what we ought to do with this money”, one minister noted.
“For it is our job to spread the good news
and take care of our children
and a new community center
will give us a platform to do both.”

“That would be nice,” the other minister noted,
“But it is our Christian mandate
to take care of the poor and needy.
So I think we ought to spend that money
on a new outreach center
that serves meals and offers shelter.”

Ironically neither minister would budge on his position
—failing to see that both could be accomplished.
Instead they grew ever more insistent
about their position

of what was most important Christian duty.
It all came to a head when,
after citing several bible verse here,
and quoting Christ's red letter words there,
one minister blurted out,
"what translation of the bible are you reading, exactly?"

One last illustration.

In the movie, *The Book of Eli*,
Denzel Washington and Mila Kunis
play two characters in a post apocalyptic world
where anarchy and violence are rampant.
Denzel's character, Eli is carrying a book,
a book he reads every day,
and you learn that this book
is the most important thing to him in the world.
His job is to keep this book safe
and to take it west.
It is a prized possession in a barren world.

But of course there is a power-hungry thug
who wants the book because
as he explains to his gang,

"It's not just a book,
it's a weapon aimed right at the hearts and minds
of the weak and desperate.

If we could get our hands on it,
we can control them.
If we want to rule more than one small town,
we have to have it.

People will come from all over
and they'll do exactly what I tell them to do.
It has happened before and it will happen again,
all we need is that book."

Well by the end of a very violent movie
the power-hungry thug captures Mila Kunis at gun point,
forcing Denzel to choose
between saving her life and giving up the book.
As Mila is released
and they continue on their journey west,
she apologizes.

Solara: I'm sorry. This is all my fault. If I didn't come with you none of this would've happened.

Eli: It's not your fault. I did what I had to do.

Solara: I didn't think anything could make you give up that book. I thought it was too important.

Eli: All the years I've been carrying it and reading it every day...I got so caught up with keeping it safe I forgot to live by what I learned from it.

Solara: Yeah, and what's that?

Eli: Just...do for others more than you do for yourself. That's what I got from it anyway.³

I forgot to live by what I learned from it.
You've guessed what book he was carrying, right?

This is our identity:
to do more for others than for ourselves.
Don't let anyone, a pastor, a friend, a parent, or Stan,
convince you otherwise.
The temptation to keep our scripture safe, is strong.
But that only serves us, not the world.

So read our story so that you'll know it.
because it's meaning can get twisted
in self-serving ways all the time.

It isn't the translation that you read,
it is how you live the story that matters.

³ <http://www.thesource4ym.com/movieclipdiscussions/Discussion.aspx?id=250>