

7 Ways of Resistance for Lent
Week One: Rejection
Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus was led away by the Spirit. Away from what? The cities where he was preaching? The shadow of John the Baptist? How did the Spirit draw him away?

The Spirit drew him away to face temptation by the devil. Hardcore.

Jesus fasted forty days and nights (i.e. so long he lost count of days). He was famished. Hungry. Ready to indulge.

“If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”

It's not only the temptation to satisfy one's longing, one's desire, but the self-doubt that has crept in. Is he *really* the Son of God? Prove yourself. Show yourself. Show off to others. Satisfy your own needs and desires to prove who you are.

No.

“One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Like a mother eagle feeding her hatchlings. That's how God feeds us, how we survive, how we live.

The devil took him to the holy city, placed him on the pinnacle of the temple. Jesus looked down, frightened.

“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.’”

Prove it. Prove you are God's Son and fly. Let the angels catch you. I've got Scripture on my side. Prove to me you are who you think you are. Because if you're not, shouldn't you end this charade now?

No.

“Again, it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” He could quote Scripture too. He didn't need to prove himself.

Then the devil took him to a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world. Wouldn't it be great to be king of it all? To rule the world with an iron fist and have things go the way you want them to? Wouldn't it be great to restore order and create peace?

“All of these I will give you, if you fall down and worship me.”

(STAR WARS fans, see the end of Episode III, when the Emperor promises Annakin that now they will have peace. Annakin has given into the temptation.)

But Jesus sees through all that. He knows it wouldn't last. He knows that empire is NOT the way. Empire is subjugation, enslavement, abuse, appropriation. Empire is colonization and domination. Empire is not freedom.

Who is the devil? The devil is absolute power and control. The devil is the one who says that in order to have peace we must have domination. The devil is the one who says we must use violence to stop violence. Hate your enemies to stop hate.

The devil is also the one that whispers "you are not good enough. You are not who you think you are. You can't make a difference in the world; you can't even take care of yourself let alone others. Who do you think you are?"

"Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only God!'"

For if God is our Lord, then the emperor is not.

If Jesus is Lord, then Caesar is not.

If Jesus is our Savior, then presidents and leaders and parties and coalitions and governments and countries are not.

Cyrus the Great of Persia allowed the exiled Israelites to return home and rebuild their temple... but he was still the king of the Persian Empire. The Roman Empire allowed the Jewish people to worship their God in their temple, and at times allowed Christians to worship freely, but they were still the Roman Empire. They still thought of their ways as better than others. They still controlled and dominated and allowed systems of sin to prevail.

So too, do our contemporary empires allow systemic sin to persist. The school-to-prison pipelines. The wealth gap that continues to grow and the millions living in poverty to increase in numbers while profits increase in billions for companies and executives. The lifting up of one religious group over others, of one language above others, of one skin color above others. The discrimination of different people over their gender or who they choose to love or become family with. Empire sows fear because through fear empire can control. Laws are passed in a hurry, orders given, under the illusion of safety and security, when in reality, it increases the Us versus Them rhetoric.

"If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

To resist empire means to turn back to the teachings of Christ, but also to seek our kindred in the world and listen to their stories. Jesus ate with tax collectors and prostitutes, called fishermen and insurrectionists (Simon the Zealot) and foul-tempered folks (John and James were called "Sons of Thunder" for a reason) and women who used their power and privilege (Joanna, Susanna, and Mary in Luke 8:1-3) to resist empire and to become part of the kingdom of God, the beloved community. The Kingdom of God/Beloved Community (or whatever language you might use) is counter to Empire. The Beloved Community is how we resist empire.

Away with you, Satan!

Away with you, self-doubt and fear!

I reject you, Empire and your lies of safety and security and peace!

Worship God, and follow Jesus, for Jesus has already showed us the true way to peace and life—love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength—and love your neighbor as yourselves.

Worship Ideas for Rejecting Empire

Table décor: half-build Lego buildings, with bricks all over the place—the rubble of empire. Build a Lego wall that runs down the middle of the rubble, showing that walls only cause more destruction. Set the Communion Elements among the Legos.

Mission Ideas for Rejecting Empire

- Serve God by serving others. Collect items for a local organization that helps folks living on the streets. Put together bags or boxes following worship of toiletry kits.
- Send postcards to a church in another country (perhaps a partner church in Mexico, or churches in one of the seven countries recently affected by the executive order on immigration). Share your thoughts and prayers of solidarity and hope.

Liturgy

Call to Worship

We are tempted to believe we aren't good enough,

But God has called us "Beloved."

We are tempted to believe that we should accept the ways of the world,

But Christ has shown us The Way, and the Truth, and the Life.

We are tempted to believe that others should conform to our ways,

But the Spirit has shown us that God has called all people to be the Beloved Community.

We are tempted to fall in line and live according to worldly measures of success,

*Come, join the way of God, shown to us by Christ,
and follow the movement of the Spirit into new life.
Come, worship God, who leads us into life.*

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Jesus, Lord, Anointed One: You have shown us the way, to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. You have taught us to resist violence and instead to love our enemies. You have called us to love our neighbors as ourselves, to admit our shortcomings and instead embrace Your love and forgiveness, and to extend that same grace to others. But we have given in to the temptation of the world: we have followed worldly measures of success. We have fallen into the ways of empire because we are promised wealth and worldly gain. Forgive us for our short-sightedness and for not seeking Your ways. Forgive us for neglecting our neighbors in need. Forgive us for building walls that keep others out for false notions of safety and security, for in doing so, we have neglected the children of God. Forgive us, restore us, and call us into Your ways of love, justice, and mercy. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God knows each of us by name. God knows our hearts. God has called each one of us a beloved child. Embrace this belonging, and extend that same notion to others. See one another as your sibling, as God's child, and see their needs as your own. Go, live into God's ways, seek to reconcile with others, and share the love and forgiveness of God. Amen.

Prayer

God of the Universe, You have given us this one planet to cultivate, to share, to be stewards of, but we have divided it up. We have decided that one corner is ours and not another's. We have forgotten that all belongs to You, and that we belong to You. Help us to remember. Help us, when we are involved in lawmaking, to remember that this is Your Earth, the world that was entrusted to us to care. Help us, when we are involved in decision-making, to remember that all of the people we know in the universe live right here with us. Help us, when we are fearful of others, or concerned about making a living and providing for our own needs and desires, to remember that You have given us all we need on this planet, and that we are called to share of the resources for all. Help us, when we do not have enough, to remember to call upon our siblings in this world, and for those of us that do have enough, to recognize it and to do our part. God of the Universe, open our hearts to You and Your ways, as taught to us through Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Friend. Amen.