

Let us pray,

Lord, remind us of the dangers of evil. Give us the strength and the wisdom to see the difference between what is good and what is not.

Amen.

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Let's talk about the devil.

I don't know about you but I have struggled with the whole Devil story.

For those who may be unaware, the serpent, the tempter, in the Garden of Eden is often attributed to the Devil, however, there is no real good biblical reasoning for us to assume this.

The only thing that we have to go on is tradition.

People in the past have said it is the devil, so we have just accepted that the serpent is the Devil.

We also have the story in Job, where we have Satan, the accuser. Accusing Job that he doesn't actually have unconditional love for God.

And we see in today's story with Jesus, another Satan, who is tempting Jesus.

And this Devil or Satan, both names are used, is described as having some sort of ownership over the kingdoms of the world. If the Devil owns the kingdoms, what does that say about the Kingdoms?

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To be honest with you all, I have often struggled with this concept of Devil or Satan.

It makes me feel a bit weird to think that God allows a rogue agent to just tempt humans and in this case even tempt God.

What is the role of this tempter?

I also struggle with this idea of spiritual warfare.

That somehow there is this war going on outside of the physical realm between Satan and his fellow fallen angels and those who stayed true to God.

Is this actually happening? Or is it just an explanation on why the world is the way it is?

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The bible often times personifies concepts and human experiences.

So is the Devil just a made up person to help us understand the realities of temptation and the accusatory nature of humans towards God and each other?

Or is the Devil a real being?

Or is it both?

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Well the older I get, and the more time I spend in prayer, I am starting to think it is both.

The reason I think it is both, is that to blame the devil or blame God for all of our problems is to deny the very real agency that we have as rational beings.

But on the flip side of that coin, I think we are not as intelligent or rational as we like to think that we are.

And I think it is fair to blame the Devil or God, for putting us in situations where we are likely fail.

I do believe there is something out there, tempting us, or testing us.

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But at some point we do need to take accountability for our own actions and we can't put all of the blame on someone or something else.

And I think that is my biggest issue with the Devil.

It allows us or gives us the ability to justify our actions.

Or at least place blame somewhere else.

And so often, we seek justification when we should be seeking accountability and forgiveness.

God wants us to take accountability, and accept forgiveness, not to justify our actions.

The trap of justification is that it gives us the moral or ethical pass to do bad things, if we think the intentions are good.

Or the end result will be good.

And all of us have done things in the past that we are not proud of, and many of us don't like to think of ourselves as bad people, so we tend to look towards justification or blame.

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We see this in today's scripture readings;

In Eve's case, the Devil made me do it,

or in Adams case, my wife, the one you gave to me God, made me do it.

Blaming both God and Eve, good one Adam.

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We like to think that if we can justify our actions than our past mistakes will be washed away.

But that is not the way forward.

The way forward is repentance.

The way forward is accountability for the harm done.

The way forward, is saying, I know I am not perfect, I know I have done things wrong, I know there are things that I regret.

And lord, I seek your forgiveness.

And because of Jesus, we know we are forgiven.

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We are freed from our sins, not by justifying them or blaming other people or the devil for them, but by giving them to God, and accepting forgiveness.

For some reason, us humans just don't like being wrong.

We don't like admitting it, we don't like admitting that we aren't as good as we think we are.

But God isn't requiring us to be perfect people, he is requiring us to come to him when we aren't perfect, when we have done things wrong.

I often wondered, if Adam and Eve, instead of pointing the finger and blaming everyone but themselves, if they just went to God and said, God I am sorry, please forgive me.

I wonder if they would have been welcomed back into the Garden of Eden?

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Repentance isn't an option, its a requirement for Godly living.

We are required as faith-filled people, to be assured that we will be forgiven, so that we can freely and openly acknowledge and accept the reality that we have done harm, intentionally or unintentionally.

And to not to try and justify it, or place blame, but to accept accountability, seek repentance, and accept forgiveness when given.

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The Devil may or may not exist.

But just like the serpent in the Garden of Eden, the Devil is not the one who is making us do evil things.

The Devil is not innocent, and the Devil will have to answer to their own actions.

But it is not fair nor appropriate in my mind, to blame all of the problems in the world on a tempter or the Devil.

We had a part to play in this as well.

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Its also important that we realize, that Jesus' unwillingness to be swayed by the Devil is not meant to make us feel bad about ourselves.

It isn't meant to make us feel like if Jesus can deny the Devil, then so can I!

No we can't!

At least not completely.

The point in this story is to show that God is more powerful than the tempter.

This Gospel story is to show that God cannot be swayed by the temptations of the world, and that who God is, is not up for negotiation and God's love cannot be bought.

That's the good news.

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The Devil has no power over God, and therefore anything that the Devil may do or encourage us to do, is not beyond the love and forgiveness that God has for us.

This isn't a story of how we need to be like Jesus,

Its a story on how we need Jesus.

Don't let the temptations of justification, denial, scapegoating, or blame, sway you from the freedom of accountability and true forgiveness.

God wants us to be free, not captives to our own actions.

Fail forward, be brave, take accountability, seek God, and accept forgiveness.

Freedom comes when the light is shown in the darkness.

Be not afraid, for our sins are not stronger than God's love for us.

Amen.