

1ST SUNDAY IN LENT

FEBRUARY 17, 2013

GOD'S OWN CHILD

Pastor Jim Dunn

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Offerings of Firstfruits and Tithes

26 "When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance and have taken possession of it and live in it, **2** you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from your land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket, and you shall go to the place that the Lord your God will choose, to make his name to dwell there. **3** And you shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, 'I declare today to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our fathers to give us.'

4 Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the Lord your God.

5 "And you shall make response before the Lord your God, 'A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. **6** And the Egyptians treated us harshly and humiliated us and laid on us hard labor. **7** Then we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. **8** And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, [a] with signs and wonders. **9** And he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

10 And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O Lord, have given me.' And you shall set it down before the Lord your God and worship before the Lord your God. **11** And you shall rejoice in all the good that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house, you, and the Levite, and the sojourner who is among you.

Luke 4:1-13

The Temptation of Jesus

4 And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness **2** for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. **3** The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." **4** And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" **5** And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, **6** and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. **7** If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." **8** And Jesus answered him, "It is written, "'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'" **9** And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, **10** for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,' **11** and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" **12** And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" **13** And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

The Miracle Worker is the 1962 film based on Helen Keller's autobiography. It begins with a very young Helen Keller, blind and deaf since infancy due to a severe case of scarlet fever. She is frustrated by her inability to communicate. She often has violent and uncontrollable tantrums. Just as frustrated and unable to parent her, her parents contact the Perkins School for the Blind for assistance.

Anne Sullivan is sent to the Keller home to tutor her. But Anne Sullivan becomes more than a tutor to Helen. She tries to break down Helen's walls of silence and darkness through persistence and love. She tries to teach Helen to communicate by using her fingers to spell letters.

The climax of the movie is when Helen *grasps* Anne's hand and is able to "spell" the word "water" in it. The young girl who plays Helen Keller in the movie is Patty Duke. Like

Helen Keller, the time came when her real parents no longer parented Patty. In fact, Patty was not even her birth name. Her real name was Anna Marie.

Though at the time no one had diagnosed it, she suffered from bipolar depression. So, the way her name was changed to Patty was traumatic. One day her foster mother simply announced to her, "Anna Marie is dead. You're Patty now." This was the wrong thing to say, especially to a bipolar depressive. For years she had had daily panic attacks about death. If Anna Marie was dead, then she did not know who she was anymore. She had no identity.

I imagine something similar happening to our dear friend John Cation. For the first ten years of his life his name was Junior. Then, one day he was told, "You're not Junior anymore. You're Johnny."

What does that do to a person's sense of identity? So much of our identity is tied up with our name. Yet, so much of our identity is in relation to the people in our life. So, whose child are you when your teacher, as in Helen Keller's case, raises you? Whose child are you when evil foster parents, as in Patty Duke's case, raise you? Whose child are you when your grandparents, as in John's case, raise you? Whose child are you? What is your identity? What is making it hard for you to *grasp* and hold on to that identity?

Israel was instructed to confess their identity while *grasping* their bushel baskets. Israel was about to enter the Promised Land. Moses had not yet gone up to Mount Nebo to look out across the land and then die. Rather, through Moses the Lord was giving Israel some last instructions before crossing into Canaan. "After you have taken possession of land which the Lord your God is giving you, after your first harvest from your land, you shall take some of the first fruits and put it in a basket and set it down before the altar of the Lord your God. Then in all the places where you 12 tribes will be, scattered throughout Canaan, you will confess loud enough for your pagan neighbors to hear: 'My father was a perishing Aramean, weak, vulnerable. And he went down to Egypt and lived there, few in number. There my father became a great nation. The Egyptians treated us harshly, but the Lord your God brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. He brought us to this land, flowing with milk and honey. Now I am giving Him merely what He has given me, this bushel basket of first fruits.'"

This was Israel's witness and testimony to the people around them. It was also a confession of their identity, not only of who their earthly perishing fathers were, but also of whose children they were: children of the Lord your God, a term used nine times in today's Old Testament reading. This was very important, this confession of their identity, after how much trouble their parents had had with losing their *grasp* on their identity in the years of wilderness wandering.

After passing through the waters of the Red Sea, Israel had been led by the Lord into the wilderness to be tested. They eventually became hungry. Did they believe that man does not live by bread alone? Did they rely on the Word of God? Did they believe that they were the dear children of the Lord your God?

No, they grumbled, because they didn't know who they were anymore. How do we know? We've done the same. At times instead of letting God's Word steer us, we let our stomachs and selfish desires and what we want and distrust of God's promises steer us. Then, whose children are we?

Then, Israel became thirsty, and they quarreled with Moses over water. Did they trust the Lord to protect their lives, as His dear children?

No, they tested the Lord by saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?" Once again they didn't know who they were anymore. How do we know? We've done the same. We at times have not trusted the Lord to protect us. When the way became difficult and long, we picked a different course to take. Then, whose children were we?

Then, Israel became concerned that the situation had gotten out of hand. Moses had been up on the mountaintop and had been gone for so long. Where was their leader?

So, they made Aaron fashion for them a golden calf to worship instead of the Lord your God, because once again they didn't know who they were anymore. How do we know? We've done the same whenever we have reduced God and reduced

Christianity to something that doesn't require us to change our behavior or doesn't require us to change our thinking. Then whose children are we?

In all these ways we lose sight of, we lose *grasp* of whose children we are and how to live as the baptized children of God.

So, when Jesus passed through the waters and was led into the wilderness to be tempted, it might not have been to provide us an example of how to fight temptation. When tempted, the children of God have not always fared so well. So, Jesus was sent in our place to do what we have not done, to do it for us, to be tempted in our place, to defeat the devil for us.

By never losing His grasp on whose child He is. Time after time, the devil said to Him, "If you are the Son of God..." For Jesus, there was no "if" about it. He is the Son of God, and in every temptation He obeyed the Lord your God as a Son would do. When hungry He let God's Word steer Him instead of His stomach. When tempted to steer His own course out of fear, He refused and stayed the course that would take Him to a cross. When tempted to place His own needs above ours, He did not. He remained perfectly obedient to His Father, in our place.

Jesus never placed Himself above us and beyond the devil's reach. When it was over, we're told the devil departed from Him until an opportune time. That opportune time would come. The devil would get another shot at Jesus, because Jesus never put Himself beyond Satan's reach. He would be tempted even to "come down from the cross if you are the Son of God." He took our place, so, we are never beyond His reach. Not when we sin, not when we're tempted, not when we forget who we are, not when our body lies asleep in the grave. With a mighty hand and an outstretched arm He brought Israel out of the harsh toil of slavery and with the outstretched arms of the cross and His resurrection He brought us out of the slavery to sin, the devil, and hell. He will bring our bodies out of their graves.

We're never beyond His reach. Today He is able to reach down into our mouths with His body and blood. Assuring us of whose children we are, so that we recognize the devil's temptations for what they are: attacks on our identity. So, by the strength of His

outstretched arm, we grasp who we are, we know who we are from God's Word and we live out that identity in the world. Amen