

Full to the Brim – Even in the Desert
Luke 4: 1-13
Don Lincoln

During the civil war, southern plantation owners were unable to ship cotton North due to embargo blockades. One owner, with a huge load of cotton, was determined to make an end run around the blockades and get his cotton North.

He approached a riverboat captain who appeared to have plenty of room on his boat, and asked if the captain would haul the cotton North for a share of the sale? "NO!" said the captain. What if I pay you an additional \$100 up front on top of your share of the sale? "No." What about \$500? "No." A thousand? "Certainly NOT!"

The plantation owner got out his pencil and did a little bit of figuring; determined what his bottom line was, and said "I'll give you \$3,000 to carry this load North!!" The captain immediately pulled a gun, and said to the man, "Get off my boat! **You're too near my price!**"

In common parlance, we might say the plantation owner sure was "full of himself" – trying to tempt the riverboat captain as he did. Full of himself – having an inflated view of one's importance, often to the annoyance of others. "Oh, he was so full of himself!"

But I like to think it was the riverboat captain who was **full of himself the most**. Full of himself in the **very best sense of the word**. Full of a knowledge of his own true self – his limits; his susceptibility; his potential for being tempted.

That's what came to mind with this text about Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Jesus was hardly full, the way we usually think of it. He has not cast out a demon, not preached a sermon, has healed no one, had no crowds pressing in to hear his brilliant teaching. All we know at this point is that He has been baptized. He has returned from the Jordan River, and is in the wilderness – alone, fasting and hungry, led by the Spirit to this place.

But note how the text in Luke 4 begins: "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit." **He WAS full**. Full of the Spirit of God. Which, if you and I wanted to take a most interesting, trinitarian twist in our understanding, Jesus **WAS** full of Himself!

I'm half joking, but like that riverboat captain, I honestly think Jesus was indeed, **full of Himself**, in the best sense of the word. Full of the deeper, overflowing comprehension of who He was in the firm grip and the decided calling of God.

1. Jesus is tempted by the devil to turn the limestone in sight into bread. Remember, temptation would hardly be tempting – if it wasn't attractive. **Jesus was fasting – and hungry.** But we also know He cared about the hungry in Judea. Feeding 5,000 a couple times is a pretty good indicator. **Imagine all that bread; all those stones.** But Jesus knows, it's the heart God is after – not the stomach. A full belly may be good; a full heart even better. After all, it's heart-fullness that will get you through all times – whether feast or famine.

2. Jesus is tempted by the possibilities of political, earthly-kingdom power. Could He build a just society from a throne in Rome? Again, not a bad idea. **But not the best.**

The best is not a right society forced from the top down, but rather birthed in the hearts and minds of each and every citizen – grown in the fertile soil of grace, forgiveness and love, as opposed to what we still see every day – violence, invasion, and conquering power. Jesus is filled that day with hope for a kingdom ruled by the heart and the mind, not by the hand and the sword. A kingdom whose allegiance would be to God and to God alone, not to the powers or evils of this world.

3. Throw yourself off the temple pinnacle. Do something amazing! Spectacular. They will flock to you. Yes – but here today, gone tomorrow, waiting for the next circus to roll into town. Jesus knew the personal way, the hard way, the walking-and-talking-with-people way – the way of the cross – was the way to win hearts forever. He was full to the brim with the knowledge of what was really necessary to draw all the world to Him.

And so for us, this Lenten journey begins with our own letting go. Letting go of the illusion – **the full-of-ourselves-illusion** that we are or could be or should be in control of our lives. And instead, being full of the knowledge that we are, body and soul, in life and in death, even in the desert, in the hands of a great and gracious God. Thanks be to God!

As I said on Ash Wednesday, our friends at Sanctified Art gave us our theme for Lent this year entitled “Full to the Brim.” It almost sounds counterintuitive for those of us who remember giving up things, or emptying for Lent. But the purpose of giving up and emptying was never to be hollow – but to make room to be filled.

Don't listen to the voice in your head that warns you about self-emptying. “You'll starve. You'll go nuts. You won't be you anymore if you let go of all of that.” It's really tempting to listen to that voice. Don't listen to it.

But rather, for this Lent, friends, let us decide once again **whose** we are and whose we will be. Let us settle for nothing less than the fullness of the LORD. Let us be filled with what is eternal, what is bigger than anything you and I can or anybody else can manufacture. Let us be filled – heart and mind with the power, the wonder and the saving, redeeming love of God in Christ Jesus. May it be so. Amen.