



## **“LOVE AND LOSING”**

**SCRIPTURE: LUKE 4:1-13**

**GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC**

**Sunday, March 9, 2025, Lent One**

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### **Luke 4: 1-13**

4:1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 4:2 where for forty days he was tested by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. 4:3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." 4:4 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" 4:5 Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 4:6 And the devil said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. 4:7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." 4:8 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" 4:9 Then the devil led him to Jerusalem and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 4:10 for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' 4:11 and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" 4:12 Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 4:13 When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

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The season of Lent begins in the ashes. Where called to sit, even to wear as a mark on our bodies, that the ashes hold what is most true for us. There is no such thing as life that is not intimate with death. Grief is the dynamic layer of how we are made that tends those ashes, the fire at the heart of our life force, the flame of Christ within each of us.

Grief is love. Grief is truth. Grief is our capacity for truth.

This Lenten season we are supported in our journey by the work of Francis Weller, the author of “The Wild Edge of Sorrow: Rituals of Renewal and the Sacred Work of Grief.” He gives us the language of the 5 gates of grief. Many of the phrases that abiding with us during our gathering ritual were from this book.

***(read quote about ashes on page 16)***

Lent is a collective time of tending to those ashes together. And the story we are called to begin with in scripture every year is Jesus tempted in the wilderness.

Every year, I learn different layers of this story. It is an ancient tradition that circulated in the early Mediterranean world—that Jesus was tested, tempted by the forces of evil. That this time in the wilderness was defining for him—a threshold that ushered him into his public ministry. Stories of Jesus’ time in the wilderness were passed around before they were written down—these were stories that built trust and confidence in his trustworthiness. This was a man who stood up to evil and sealed his integrity.

His clarity and courage when tempted in these elemental ways—to sell out from hunger, from greed, from a lust for power, and he stood in his clarity of purpose and identity. He was not here to hoard resources, or grab power, or oppress. He was here for healing, for truth, for liberation from these things that pull us away from our shared humanity, from what is most true about us.

This year, I hear and feel the visceral impact of this story of Jesus’ gravitas in a new way. Gravitas comes from the same word that grief does. It has heft, a heaviness, a solemnity, a seriousness. Gravitas is a sobriety, a clarity, even a majesty, a dignity. It is a value from Greek and Roman cultures in a leader that instills confidence and trust from those being led.

Grief comes from this same root word, gravis, which means heavy. Weller defines gravitas as the quality of character of a person who is able to carry the weight of the world with a dignified bearing. When we learn to walk with grief as a part of who we are, then we acquire this quality—this gravitas—this dignity in our very humanity.

Grief is our capacity to live in right relationship with our own humanity and with our shared humanity.

I don’t remember ever quite seeing the grief stitched in this story of Jesus’ temptation as connected to his trustworthiness. Maybe it’s acute political chaos we are living in that makes this story all the more poignant. Jesus’ trustworthiness is in the flesh, in a human being who was aligned with love so completely that we can really trust him. Sit with that for a minute—how hard it is to trust anyone, and how trustworthy Jesus shows himself to be.

He’s someone we can count on, someone who doesn’t sell out, someone who doesn’t turn out to be a liar, a cheater, a fraud. Someone not driven by politics, power, or personal gain.

He has the chops, the gravitas, the clarity, courage, compassion, confidence, connection to Divine Love, that gives us something so hard to find in this world—a true leader who won't turn out to just be in it for himself, who won't cave when the dollar signs get big enough, who won't lapse into delusions of grandeur or be ego driven at our expense. This is a man who knows his own vulnerability and his own purpose.

It means a lot to remember that God's love has this gravitas—this capacity to abide and stay true. And that this kind of heft is something grief gives us a way to access.

Grief is a way of being in our humanity that can forge deep collective trust. This Lenten journey is not about you and me being forced to feel sad for several weeks together. It's about right relationship and our trustworthiness in this big work God is always calling us toward in human life and community.

How can we be beloved community without trust? And how can we trust without truth? And how we can have truth without grief? Our bodies are made for this reality—the need for deep, trusting connection with each other and the necessity of processing the inevitable pain and suffering that human life includes.

The first gate of grief names this truth: everything you love, you lose.

What we're seeing right now in our cultural white lash is a violent resistance to this solemn truth about us as humans. Love is like oxygen—we need it for life. And to love is to lose. If we don't learn how to lose, then we don't learn how to love. White supremacy was built not on love, but on fear. White supremacy was built not on trust, but on violence and terror. White supremacy was built not on compassion, but cruelty, shame, blame.

White supremacy culture tells us to tamp down our emotions as a weakness. White supremacy tells us we are independent, autonomous, and our for ourselves.

These marks of our culture means it makes a lot of sense that we have not been taught how to welcome grief. We've been taught to keep going as if we can outrun it. We've been taught that it is sign of weakness, instead of strength. We've been taught to fear it because it might make us vulnerable, when the very opposite is true.

This Lenten journey of befriending grief is really a journey of befriending our shared humanity, it is an act of resistance to the cruelty of this political moment. This collective journey with grief is the most stabilizing thing we can do as the chaos around us accelerates.

**“Becoming skillful at digesting our grief makes us a source of reassurance and stability for the wider community.”**

**(pause)**

Grief is love. And love is the only way we truly get to mutual liberation.

**“Grief work is soul work. It requires courage to face the world as it is and not turn away, to not burrow into a hold of comfort and anesthetization.”**

The invitation is for us to trust ourselves with how we are made. We are invited to stay with our big S self—with your adult, integrated self—the Self who knows that grief is love. Your Self is the one who can tend to the other parts of you who are afraid of the pain or ashamed of the pain or angry about the pain that we all have to feel.

Jesus is the model for that integrated Adult Self—the one who knows himself and his own dignity. He is the model for love, and therefore he is the model for grief. Jesus gave it all up for love. Bread, Riches, Dominion.

Jesus gives us a kind of cosmic “attunement” in the psychic sense—he understands, acknowledges, affirms—he’s been there and so he honors the emotional depth and pain of being human.

Jesus was trauma informed—he understood the intricacies of how humans work—we need this “attunement,” this mirroring, to not languish in trauma, but to find a new depth of life in our proximity to death. That’s the part that can build our collective confidence and consciousness. Jesus teaches us not to fear death, but to know the power that it death has to actually be life-affirming and enlivening. The closer we get to this life-force, this flame of Christ that is within us and at the center of who we are collectively, the more we can truly thrive together.

Jesus holds us, comforts us, sees us, hears us, reassures us. He creates a cosmic safety net—someone we can count on that won’t cave under pressure, that won’t turn on us, betray us, forget us, dismiss us, abandon us. He’s someone we can trust with our grief, he’s someone who can teach us how our grief is a super-power, not a liability.

Weller does not go here in his book, but I am going to. There’s a depth to this entanglement between love and loss that the life of faith amplifies. And that is that love means not just that we will lose, but that love is the active willingness to lose, love means really actually being willing to lose everything for love.

Not only is it that everything we love, we lose, as a passive description of the nature of existence, but the life of faith says that if we love, we are willing to lose everything. The life of faith is the active practice of finding our purpose in life in the willingness to lose everything for love—and to trust in the promise that there is vitality and true thriving and freedom in that kind of proximity to loss and death.

So this Lenten journey does have a heaviness, a heft, an order of magnitude. But what else could our faith possibly ask of us in times like these. The world needs more gravitas—more people, more communities, more collective will to truly embrace the full promise of what love is. I pray you and me, we, can give ourselves to this intentional practice of trusting how God made us for this moment. May this journey be one that deepens our resolve to love without counting the cost and with the courage to grieve what we've lost.

Thanks be to God.