

2023.02.26. 1st Sunday of Lent SERMON ©Gyllian Davies

TEMPTATION & SNAKES. Eve and Jesus. Both tempted. Eve got sucked in, didn't she. Jesus - well we all know how that went - Satan be gone! Course Jesus, I'm guessing, has a mega evil-sensor. Fail-safe.

Do we want one of those? Sometimes! Cause sometimes it can be so challenging, can't it. Is this a good choice or a bad choice? How will I know for sure? It can get pretty tricky - you know what I mean! Something like this...

It's years ago and I'm meeting with my spiritual director, a lovely ex-Jesuit. That day I come into his prayer room all in knots over how tired I am and how much I want to do and probably I'm doing too much and how do I know which are the things God really wants me to do?

"Huh", he says. "Sounds like you're being visited by the angels of light."

"What?"

"Well, a person like you is not going to be tempted to murder or steal or burn someone's house down...?"

"yeah. And so?"

"And so along come the angels of light, offering you temptations that LOOK like good things, that LOOK like they would help the world be a better place... BUT really they're simply distractions to take you away from your true path. Then they have achieved their goal. The temptation was successful! They got you to deviate from your call from God, to wander off into a beautiful grove or along a lovely path beside a babbling brook and you are no longer doing the very things you are uniquely gifted to do. Angels of light? Yup. That's them. Tempting you with facsimiles of the real thing."

I thought about it. I see it, their goal is to lure me away from my essential identity. My identity as a lover of God. As a true being of light. One of those Jesus-people, claimed as Christ's own at my baptism. So how will I know when I am being the person God sent me here to be? I think I have, we all have a built-in fake-o-meter that goes off when we stray away from our true calling. Only you know that alert is really really soft. Not like the cell phones that ring in the middle of a service or a meeting. Soft, soft, soft. Easy to miss if we're not paying attention!

So I thought about that a lot. And it raised questions. Like - what do we need? First, we need to know who we really are. Not who our families or friends, our neighbours or co-workers, the people sitting next to you in Church this morning - NOT who *they* see you as. Instead we need to know who you are to God. You. The one God made and said "This one! Wow! Uniquely gifted. Unlike any other. One of my own. May your life be blessed."

You know that's what happens right before you're born, right? God kisses your forehead and goes "mmmmmm. Perfect. Off you go!"

Second, it helps to know what we are going to be tempted by. Maybe, as some people say, we're tempted to acquire too many things. Or, to achieve too many things. Maybe we're tempted to not give away enough of what we have. Maybe we're tempted to give low priority to the children - the wounded ones without medical care in Syria or the ones starving to death in Yemen. Or maybe we forget for weeks at a time the daily nightmare in Ukraine. Our lives are so full and how do we make time

for these tragedies and travesties that are continually taking place somewhere else in the world. You know?

But actually I think there's an even more insidious temptation. I think it's a speciality of those angels of light. I think they love to fuzz up our awareness of the climate crisis so that we continue on doing the same things we usually do, living our life in the same way as we've been doing for the past decade or so.

Or maybe they cultivate our forgetfulness so that we don't remember to say out loud words of appreciation, words of gratitude, words of kindness. We might even think them. But then they never make it past our lips.

It can be as simple as this: I'm standing in the living-room of the woman who my 103 year old father is living with, watching the skill and love with which she cares for him. And I tell her, "You know my sisters and I think you are our father's guardian angel." She laughs and says, "Oh no. He's my guardian angel." I'm puzzled. She says, "He's teaching me how to love." Now I'm really puzzled. This woman who is so loving towards our dad is being taught how to love?!??

"What do you mean?"

"Well I set his breakfast on the table and I try to make it look nice - some quartered tomatoes next to his eggs, the toast cut in triangles.... And every single morning he stops to look at the plate before eating and says 'Doesn't that look lovely!' I've been married three times and none of my husbands ever complimented me on my cooking or my presentation of the food. Or I put on some nice clothes to go to a meeting and when I come out into the living room he looks at me and says 'Don't you look sharp!' Until your father moved in here, in my whole life, no-one has ever told me that I look good."

It's a lesson, right! There's so much we don't know about each other. So much we don't know about what's distressing the ones we love. What does it cost us to be kind? The angels of light want us to count the cost and hold back on the kindness.

Or they make take another tack and encourage us to resist asking someone to forgive us. Or not to tell someone - really speaking truth - that we forgive *them*. And sometimes it might simply be that we roar through our day without once looking at the world around us and saying "Oh how beautiful!"

And when we allow that forgetting, or that fuzzy awareness, or those missing kindnesses... the 'angels of light' have a party!

And what about us? We end up withholding blessing from the world. [pause]

So when that temptation comes along what are you to do? THIS.... As soon as the tiniest distractions arise... Stop. Listen. Pray. Listen some more. Listen into your deepest self where God hangs out. And then when you hear that little whisper of which direction to go - Grab hold. Trust it. Turn your face and your heart in that direction and GO.

And when those angels of light turn up with their lovely distractions? Take a moment. Take a breath. Listen into your deepest heart. And then...

Shout it out: "I'm baptized!"

Got it? Try it out right now:

Sounds pretty good to me. Child of God. Sealed and marked as one of Christ's own forever. Taken. Claimed. Not available. (dust hands together)

Amen.