

Lenten Field Guide // Week 4: Battling for the Bible

In the story of Jesus fasting in the desert for forty days, as Jesus is fasting and praying, the devil tempts him-- not using some unfamiliar text, but actually using scripture. A frequent, ever-present conflict in the Church is biblical interpretation. Some people feel that they read the bible literally though some passages read literally would be pretty tough. Some folks do not read literally and yet believe the scripture is still inspired by God but has mistakes. Some folks do not give any authority to scripture. How do you read scripture? How do you understand the Bible's authority? Do you believe that God is still speaking or that God has spoken all God will speak as it was recorded in scripture?

Though the conflict in the United Methodist Church is commonly associated by the general public with LGBTQIA persons, it is important to note that it is actually a conflict over biblical interpretation. That is a very important distinction, especially for persons who identify as LGBTQIA* persons. New Testament scholar AJ Levine once said: "the Bible should be a rock upon which our faith is built rather than a rock that is thrown at others." The stances we take, whatever they are, have implications in our everyday lives and how those lives interact with other lives. It is important to see and understand how those play out in daily living as we seek to be accountable to our theologies and biblical interpretations.

Scripture to consider: Matthew 4:1-11

Then the Spirit led Jesus up into the wilderness so that the devil might tempt him. ²After Jesus had fasted for forty days and forty nights, he was starving. ³The tempter came to him and said, "Since you are God's Son, command these stones to become bread."⁴ Jesus replied, "It's written, *People won't live only by bread, but by every word spoken by God.*"⁵ After that the devil brought him into the holy city and stood him at the highest point of the temple. He said to him, ⁶"Since you are God's Son, throw yourself down; for it is written, *I will command my angels concerning you, and they will take you up in their hands so that you won't hit your foot on a stone.*"⁷ Jesus replied, "Again it's written, *Don't test the Lord your God.*"⁸ Then the devil brought him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹He said, "I'll give you all these if you bow down and worship me."¹⁰ Jesus responded, "Go away, Satan, because it's written, *You will worship the Lord your God and serve only him.*"¹¹ The devil left him, and angels came and took care of him.

Mark 12:13, 38-40

They sent some of the Pharisees and supporters of Herod to trap him in his words... As he was teaching, he said, "Watch out for the legal experts. They like to walk around in long robes. They want to be greeted with honor in the markets. ³⁹They long for places of honor in the synagogues and at banquets. ⁴⁰They are the ones who cheat widows out of their homes, and to show off they say long prayers. They will be judged most harshly."

Journeying through Lent with Children:

For children, Lent can be a time to practice our disciple skills as we get ready for Easter! Because Lent can go on and on and on from a child's perspective, it is easier for them to commit to practicing a skill for one week rather than for six weeks. What if each week in your home, you practice one skill with your child?

This week, try: **Praising God** – practice saying “wow, God” every time you encounter God doing something amazing! **Thanking God** – practice saying “Thank you God” every time you eat something yummy or see or do something wonderful. Make a list of all those thank yous (on your own or with your family) at the end of the day and thank God again.

Acts of Worship: Take some time this week to prepare your heart for the communal worship that we do together each week at Belmont. Think about the rhythm of the service you attend. Think about the taste of the bread and juice from the Great Thanksgiving; think about the sounds of the hymns, the bells, and the choir anthems; think about the words said in prayer and in the sermon; think about the light of the candle and the colors of the liturgical season; think about how you are greeted with the kindness of a smile; think about baptisms; think about how it feels to give offering; think about who you look forward to seeing every week there. Worship at Belmont is a very special time for our community. I hope that it is a place of rejuvenation for us to gain strength after serving and loving others in the week prior. In thinking about these aspects of worship, what is most meaningful to you about Belmont’s worship?

Acts of Devotion and Spirituality: Read the above scripture, Matthew 4:1-11, and practice Lectio Divina with it. Lectio Divina is an ancient practice of reading a scripture a few times over and mediating on it in prayer. There are many ways to do this; here is one!

-Go to a quiet place and ready yourself to listen to the Word of God

-Read the scripture passage out loud, once through

-Pause and recall if a word or phrase stood out to you. If so, pause and sit with it in meditation and see what it is, what it feels like, what it shows you. Wonder about it.

-Then go back and read the passage to find a fuller meaning.

-Pause again and see what came to you.

-Meditate longer. End in prayer: talking to God about what came forth.

Acts of Justice and Resistance: Consider work that Belmont is connected to and if you are feeling called to get involved: [Nashville Organized for Hope \(NOAH\)](#)

Acts of Mercy: Consider work that Belmont is connected to and if you are feeling called to get involved: [Mama Lynn Center](#), [Project Transformation Nashville](#)

[Check out the sermon at this link \(posted on Monday\)!](#)