

## Podcast Transcript

TWIR 2.26.23 First Sunday of Lent Year A

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7    Psalm 32    Romans 5:12-19    **Matthew 4:1-11**

<<Music: “Building Up a New World,” 1st verse, fade out under opening.>>  
<<“We are building up a new world, builders must be strong.”>>

[Intro and Transition:]

[Intro:]

- Hello y'all. Welcome back to The Word Is Resistance, the podcast where we're exploring what Christian sacred texts have to teach us about living, surviving, even thriving in the context of empire, tyranny, violence, and repression - the context in which we are living today. Through Christian scripture and our various traditions, what guidance can we find and imagination can we practice, as white folks, about our role in resistance, in showing up, in practices of repentance and liberation?
- My name is M. Rev. M Jade Kaiser -formerly, M Barclay, but recently returning to my given last name. My pronouns are they/them and I am one of three co-directors and a co-founder of a collective called 'enfleshed' where we create and facilitate spiritual nourishment for collective liberation. I am southern grown but currently residing in the Midwest, in the place currently known as Iowa City, IA but first home to the Ioway, Otoe, Omaha, Pawnee, Sioux, Sauk, and Meskwaki peoples.
- This podcast is a project of SURJ Faith and is particularly designed for white Christians—white Christians talking to other white Christians about race and white supremacy – about being a part of returning and tending all relations. We believe white Christians have a responsibility to commit ourselves to resisting white supremacy, to speaking up and showing up and disrupting white supremacy where we find it, especially through the Christian tradition. Any of us white folks who have grown up with a relationship to Christianity - whether conservative, liberal, evangelical, or progressive - have inherited Christian specific facets of white supremacy that we have the power and responsibility to unlearn and imagine anew, including our conception of the divine.

- We do this work remembering we are building up a new world. This live recording of Dr. Vincent Harding's song for the freedom movement is of a multi-racial "movement choir practice" in Denver, CO in December 2014, led by Minister Daryl J. Walker. We are deeply grateful to the Freeney-Harding family for letting us use the song for this podcast.

*[Transition:]*

*For grounding, I invite you to settle in, take a breath, and receive this poem from Clint Smith:*

"Some evenings, after days when the world feels like it has poured all of its despair into me, when I am awash with burdens that rests atop my body like a burlap of jostling shadows, I find a place to watch the sun set. I dig my feet into a soil that has rebirthed itself a million times over. I listen to the sound of leaves as they decide whether or not it is time to descend from their branches. It is hard to describe the comfort one feels in sitting with something you trust will always be there, something you can count on to remain familiar when all else seems awry. How remarkable it is to know that so many have watched the same sun set before you. How the wind can carry pollen and drop it somewhere it has never been. How the leaves have always become the soil that then they become the leaves again. How maybe we are not so different from the leaves. How maybe we are also always being reborn to be something more than we once were. How maybe that's what waking up each morning is. A reminder that we are born of the same atoms as every plant and bird and mountains and ocean around us."

So, so good. Thank you Clint Smith.

Now, I'm going to read our text for this week. It' Matthew 4:1-11, as always, tweaked to disrupt the compulsory masculinization of God.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written,

'One does not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,

'God will command God's angels concerning you,'  
and 'On their hands they will bear you up,  
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.' "

Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put God to the test.' "

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him,

"Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

'Worship God  
and serve only Them.' "

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

<<Music interlude, verse 2 of "Building Up a New World.">>

<<"Courage, sisters, brothers, people: don't get weary, though the way be long.">>

All right y'all, I am so excited to be diving into this text with you on the first Sunday of Lent. As you may or may not know, we are focusing on disrupting anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism throughout the season of Lent, within the texts and our engagement with the texts, within Christian Theology and its application to the world today. So, as we begin together, I would like to frame this text and this episode and perhaps for some of you if you'd like, frame the Lenton season around this lens with these words from Dr Judith Plaskow who is a feminist Jewish scholar. This is from her essay called 'feminist anti Judaism and the

Christian God.' She asks, "must Jesus be different from every other human being who ever lived in order for Christianity to make sense? Can Christians value Jesus if he was just a Jew who chose to emphasize certain ideas and values in the Jewish tradition but did not invent or have a monopoly on them?"

Dr Plaskow, you know ask this question in a larger journal article around the ways that even those of us who align with feminism or other resistance lineages can still cling to these insidious theologies that demand a kind of opposition with Judaism. She she rightly asks 'is that necessary... is that necessary"...is that inherent hierarchy of claiming Jesus as unique, which then immediately makes him unique within his own Jewish tradition, which that uniqueness is built on a lot of ignorant assumptions on our part that then we are taught and inherent...inherit... and so I just find this question these questions to be great ones to bring specifically through the season of Lent as we journey with Jesus up to State execution and on to the other side into the season of Easter.

And so and I know that this hits on a to what many people has been a central doctrine of Christianity...to many people *the* central Doctrine doctrine of Christianity. For me it once was and very much no longer is. And I do believe that there are very valuable and satisfying and authentic expressions of Christianity that do not indeed require Jesus to be pitted against his own tradition or even removed from it by becoming the one and only of anything frankly. I don't believe that he thought he was and neither did his followers immediately after his life. So that may be quite a departure from what some of you are used to imagining and certainly it is a departure from many of my years of faith. But I hope that you'll at least explore with me what it might look like to realign Jesus with his colleagues and beloveds of his time and how that also enables us to align with Jesus today in a different kind of relationship. One where he is less over and above any of us and more alongside us, reminding us of our own capacities to enflesh God on Earth.

So with that said, I do want to start with this text and verse 3. Just noting that the very first thing that the tempter does when Jesus is in the wilderness is question... I don't think it's so much that the tempter is questioning if Jesus is worthy of the title of 'Son of God' so much as the tempter is asking 'if this is the sort of tradition with which you're going to align then here's some questions for you.' And part of what makes me feel that way is putting this language, 'the Son

of God' back in the context of both the Jewish tradition and the Roman political context. Those of us who are raised raised Christian are often taught to hear the 'Son of God' language as if it is uniquely used for Jesus. Which is interesting in that we can be so comfortable with being called children of God but 'Son of God' is treated as this wildly separate category. And, that shapes so much of how we enter this text. And so first I just want to mention that in Jesus's Jewish tradition, the language of the 'Son of God' has a lot more elasticity than we are used to in modern Christian approaches to the language. It could be used in a much broader context of like King David, for instance, Solomon and a lot of a lot of other circumstances not just Kings but a lot of people or moments even the whole of Israel is referred to in that way at various points. But it is more a way of connoting the moments or people or positions that sort of help influence or orchestrate the larger will of God for the people of Israel, specifically. And so that is the tradition in which Jesus is being engaged with this title, right. It is already when we assume that that is a title that only Jesus engages then we are already erasing his very tradition. And so that's part of the context for this text and then also I just want to note some of you are probably familiar with this but Jesus was born under the rule of Augustus who was the first ruler of the Roman Empire and considered a wild success from the Roman Empire perspective. And he was also the son of Julius Caesar and when Julius Caesar died he was deemed a god. And so Augustus was known as the 'Son of God' and this is reflective of a larger worldview that understood divinity and politics and just sort of the structure of the universe if you will in a very different way than we conceptualize now. And so some of those titles, you know, they landed differently then as they do now...then they do now...but what what we can perhaps imagine is the ways that one - obviously deities and power go together to reinforce each other - and when Augustus is able to claim his title as 'Son of God' not only does that have a kind of you know strength, if you will, especially given the context of how divinity was understood at the time to it. But it also allowed for a real mythology of what the Roman Empire was doing for the world and for the people under its power. And of course part of its propaganda was you know creating this image of it the empire being a trustworthy institution. That if you were loyal to it would provide for you. And so you would be safe, you'd be secure, you'd have food ,you have well-being. Its might would be your protection. You know, the 'son of god' following in the footsteps of Julius Caesar, represents the worldview of just 'life in the empire can be good.' Not so different than the kind of propaganda we are used to in the United States that says if you're just loyal to the systems, norms,

set of laws, you will have everything provided to you. Which then blames individuals who do not indeed have access to fair wages or health care or safety or security, who are arrested and kept in prison, and attacked - and all of the failures that we recognize of living under empire the empire says then is the fault of the individuals who don't play by the rules of the empire. Super familiar.

And so that's a part of the context under which Jesus then is called the 'Son of God.' It is not an entirely unique identifier and it is both well, one way first of all...this is a good time to note that at the end of chapter 3, right before this we're in chapter four, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist and in that story we hear God referring to him as the 'Son of God' in whom he is well pleased, right? In whom God is well pleased, right? So, what I see in this is the way that the story is starting to reveal two different sort of symbols of worldview and power, right? So we have one symbol we have the Roman Empire that has its own son of God that symbolizes the ideology of dominance and power and all of the propaganda that says 'that's the way you're going to find the life you want, for your family for your people, is just get on board with that God' so to speak. And then you have Jesus who was a part of a different system who in the stories can symbolize the the one who is voicing the will of the god of the people of Israel, who is saying 'here's a different set of values and practices and ethics and norms and cultures cultural norms that if you follow, will lead to the Liberation' you want, right? So we have these two very different gods and the people through whom they are communicating Their Will and desire and promises Etc. And Jesus is one of the people in his tradition who are trying to articulate and practice and build power around their god's approach/ worldview if you will. That flattens a little more than I wish but hopefully that makes sense.

So, here we are in the wilderness which of course already brings up you know images of Jesus's ancestors who - why were they in the wilderness - they were in the wilderness because they left Egypt and they were seeking liberation, seeking a land where they could live differently out from under a power over them, they were seeking the space and the freedom and the agency to live according to their God, their ethics, their norms, Etc. And so we can imagine how this moment where Jesus is in the wilderness, which he was led to by the spirit, symbolizes the ongoing desire for the ancient Jewish people to find, create, encounter, etc freedom.

And this sort of safe place - and by safe I don't mean like the Wilderness is safe - but I mean Jesus is not yet influencing the public in such a way that might put his people at risk. It's almost like he's got a little...again playground is too generous makes it sound too easy, but he is getting some practice if you will to see what happens when his internal edges are hit. His spiritual edges... he comes to his spiritual edges and certainly when our physical needs are being challenged, that coincides with our spiritual temptations, right? We're going to not have as much to draw on.

And so, I see him in this like moment of you know seeking to explore what he's ready for, what happens when he's challenged, what really is motivating him at the core? You know, trying to carefully spiritually engage all that before he moves more deeply into a public expression of that. That has significant consequences for not just his life but for his people and his community.

And so, here we see the very first temptation that the tempter puts before him and putting the tempter back into Jesus's Jewish tradition, we might do well to imagine a trickster kind of character who is less about trying to overthrow God and more about sort of symbolizing our own internal inclinations towards things other than the ways of God, that lead to collective flourishing. And so what I love - one of the things I love about this text is the fact that the tempter starts with bread. Liberation is about bread. People are hungry. And the teaching that Jesus is going to put forward is going to put people's bread even more at risk than it already is. Jesus is going to be asking people to take risks that leave bread on the line. And the tempter knows that and what I hear in the situation is the tempter kind of saying like all right 'son of God' you're going to be asking people to align with the god that you are sort of symbolizing, that you are teaching about and to divest from this other Son of God that represents a different system. And that's going to be a dangerous move, and people are going to be hungry and at risk. And what are you going to do about that when it comes down to it cause this is serious business. What are you going to do, command these stones to become loaves of bread? How are you going to get meals on the plate of the people that you call into this set of teachings and practices and out of loyalty to the Empire? Legit question. It's a legit question. And I hear it and movements that unfold today. There's always that real moment where somebody is calling for people to take risks and somebody else is saying 'I hear you but what are you

saying we're going to do about food or about safety when we do that?' What's your answer? Keeping it real.

And Jesus draws on the words of Deuteronomy and it's a little misleading I think in the translation because it sounds like Jesus is saying we don't even need bread. You know this the sort of abstract spiritual encounter with God will be enough and I don't that's not my understanding of the context for Deuteronomy which Jewish Scholars talk about as much more a proclamation that whatever food is provided by God will be trustworthy. And so despite the fact that in the wilderness there was no bread, like literally bread, which is what the people are used to...there was no bread but there was manna. And that is no small shift. That is a significant shift to go from bread to the strange foreign substance.

But the people decided that that bread that replacement of bread is trustworthy. And here Jesus is drawing on the wisdom of his ancestors grounding in the assurance that they are trusting in a God - that whatever that God provides - it will be trustworthy. And so it's not a super easy answer to the hard question of where is bread going to come from but it is rooted in a collective experience that he is willing to trust in. And not only for himself but for his people.

And then second I hear the tempter moving on then to what I think is less about a performance - it kind of sounds like a 'show yourself, perform this trust then that you're talking about.' And Jesus again refers to the words of his ancestors; to the the wisdom of his people. And this text again points to Deuteronomy where the the teaching reminds the people of when they were in the wilderness and there wasn't enough water and how terrifying and how costly to have to go without water in the Wilderness. That is significant and the people I think understandably we're struggling to trust that water would ever appear again. And I trust that you know as much as it can be easy to dismiss the seriousness of them in that moment that any dismissal is a product of having never had gone without access to water in your life or community and that those who have gone without access to water in their lives in communities would know that people were dying and people were sick because of this. And so would have had every understandable right to say like 'is this going to happen or what?' And even with that real struggle in their religious teaching they still choose to trust that God is going to follow through.



And so Jesus is again drawing on the collective commitment to even when there are serious consequences, choosing to trust that this God is more faithful to them and their flourishing even when they don't have signs of that faithfulness, to choose to trust it even over and against this religious Empire God.

And so Jesus you know is reaffirming that trust that Collective trust and putting his people in the care of that God. And so last, the the tempter takes I think a hard turn and tries a different approach and is like 'okay I hear your heart, you're committed. But what if I can offer you all of the stuff that you need to then actually provide a lot of the things you want to provide for yourself and your people. I can give you power. I can give you access to resources.' It makes me you know...I just I hear all of the 'if you just climb the ladder of Institutions you will have more money you can distribute, you will have more power you can distribute, you can pick who sits and see some power, you can enact the policies you want to enact. Just play by these particular rules and you can do the good you want to do through the system.' That's what I hear here. And I love it Jesus. I mean drawing on the words of his ancestors. He's not making himself unique in any way he is saying 'these are the words of my people.' I love it: away with you Satan. Like, get the hell out of here. I am committed to the god of the people of Israel. And I will only cast my loyalty to that God. Get out of here with your temptations to climb the ladder for the sake of good. Not having it. I love it. So, gosh I just I feel the way that I just moved through all of that quickly and also I'm talking a lot.

But it feels so exciting to me to talk about the way that this text invites all of us to do a similar work of exploring our spiritual and physical limitations - what leaves us feeling like we are most vulnerable to sacrificing our values, our people, our integrity, to the god of liberation? Just everything - the people we claim loyalty and alignment with? When are we most likely to sell out or justify our alignment with empire? We are all children of God - and I think that was a main message of Jesus far more than his being different than us, he was about his likeness with us which is about the capacity to enflesh god. And yeah, I would just invite you to consider this text as a like, part of Jesus' readying for his work in the liberation movement of his people. And his accountability to his people, both past and ancient, and present and to come. And his accountability to the impact of his teaching and the community he builds and the practices he encourages. Because they have consequences that are real. And that is never a thing to be

coy with. So, whether we are clergy in positions of religious influence. Whether we are people who are collaborating in movement work. Whether we are therapists. Whether we are parents. Whether we are teachers. All of us are influencing and impacting communities of people and we all have...we all have an invitation here in lent to do some some introspection. I don't think that this text is about Jesus coming up against his own ego as it's, I feel like often that is the primary interpretation that I encounter is a like yeah, Jesus and ego. I think this is much more about what it means to be committed to a people and a set of values even when pressed up against life, death, and the struggle of living integrity in the midst of dealing systems. And yeah I'm going to just kind of move from a rambling end to the hopes that throughout this season, the god that you find companioning you is not the god of Empire but is the god of the liberation of Jewish people and as the scriptures say and "all the nations." May it be so.

<<*Music interlude, verse 2 of "Building Up a New World."*>>

<<*"Courage, sisters, brothers, people: don't get weary, though the way be long."*>>

*[Call to Action and outro:]*

*[Call to Action:]*

- In this week's call to action, I invite you to check out the work of Jewish Voice for Peace. As we work to disrupt anti-semitism in our theologies and politics, we must also wrestle with the way Christianity simultaneously entangles with Palestinian oppression through Christian zionism. JVP is a great group to learn from about how we can support both our Jewish siblings and our Palestinian siblings as we strive to undo Christian supremacy in the world today. I'll put the link at the bottom of our transcript but I especially recommend visiting their website [jewishvoiceforpeace.org](http://jewishvoiceforpeace.org) and checking out their library of over 70 films you can watch for free. Consider watching one a week throughout lent!

*[Outro:]*

Thanks as always for joining us. We'd love to hear from y'all, and especially folks of color and non-Christian folks, by commenting on our Soundcloud or Twitter or Facebook pages, or filling out the survey on our podcast page at [surj dot org](http://surj.org). Give us a "like" or rate us on iTunes, Spotify, or wherever you check out our podcast.

You can find out more about SURJ at [surj dot org](http://surj.org), where you can sign up for SURJ-Faith updates and find transcripts for every episode, which include references, resources, and action

links. And finally, a shout out to our most excellent sound editor for this episode, Claire Hitchins. We appreciate all you do to make these episodes happen.

*[Words of blessing/encouragement:]*

- May your Lenten journeys be blessed beloveds. God goes with us as we companion one another.

<<Verse 3 of "Building Up A New World, Verse 1 repeated.>>

<<"Rise, Shine, Give God glory, Children of the Light"

*We are building up a new world, builders must be strong.>>*

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#### RESOURCES:

- Jewish Voice for Peace -  
<https://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/2016/11/60-films-israelpalestine-worth-watching/>

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#### REFERENCES:

[Clint Smith's work](#)

*Plaskow, Judith. Feminist Anti-Judaism and the Christian God. Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion. Vol. 7, No. 2 (Fall, 1991), pp. 99-108 (10 pages)*

*Published By: Indiana University Press*

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