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*Preached at Head of Christiana Presbyterian Church, March 9, 2014*

*Girl Scout Sunday; First Sunday of Lent*

### **“What Does Courage Taste Like?”**

Matthew 4:1-11

What a strange juxtaposition today! On one hand, we’ve got Girl Scout Sunday, full of songs and laughter and smiles; and then on the other hand we’ve got this story about Jesus being tempted by devils, while for Christians this is the first Sunday of Lent, which is a season of repentance and discipline and fasting.

To make things even more complicated, I spent most of yesterday up in Lancaster at two women’s roller derby games. That might be a surprise for those of you who don’t know me – I guess that’s not a typical pastor activity!

Some of our older folks might remember banked-track roller derby on TV in the ‘70s and ‘80s, but this looks a bit different. Modern roller derby started up about a decade ago in Austin, Texas, when a bunch of women got together and decided to revive it, by women and for women. Since then it’s grown like crazy – spread all over the world – and every league is run by the skaters themselves. They put on their own games, write their own bylaws, raise money for uniforms and travel, and even vote on the rules of the sport.

Most teams choose a charity to receive money from each of their games – they are a part of their community and they give back to their community. And it turns out that the group benefitting from last night’s game was the Girl Scouts in the Heart of Pennsylvania!

I think they probably resonated with the Girl Scout mission of “building girls of courage, confidence, and character who make the world a better place.” I know I resonate with that – it’s a pretty great mission statement.

One of the things people have heard about roller derby is derby names. Skaters choose tough or silly or smart names to go by when they join the league. How often do we get to do that? You show up somewhere and get asked, who do you want to be? It’s a blank slate.

My name, if you’re wondering, is Bruise Almighty. I love that name, because it’s pretty hard to be scared or intimidated when everyone’s calling you Bruise. Some of my friends have names like Amelia Dareheart, Marie Antiothreat, Stompin’ Lizzy Stanton– remembering strong women from our history.

And recently, some skaters have started using their real names. It’s as if they’re saying, “I think Jocelyn is a strong name too.” Susie, Melanie; these *are* strong names.

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This week, Christians are beginning the season of Lent, which is a time of focus, prayer, and honesty

about the ways we have fallen short of the people we would like to be. For us it is a reflection on the end of Jesus' life, leading up to his death on Good Friday and resurrection on Easter. In some ways it's the end of the story, but in Matthew's gospel, the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness is still the very beginning of his story – he's starting out on a journey just like we are.

As Matthew's story goes, he's written so far about Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, his family's escape to Egypt to protect the young Jesus from those who were trying to kill him, and then their return to the town of Nazareth when that particular threat had passed.

And then our writer picks up the story some years later, when the adult Jesus is ready to begin his ministry. He is baptized in the river, and a voice booms out from the sky, "this is my son!" That's the first time in Matthew's story that Jesus is called the Son of God – but as soon as it happens, we read, the Holy Spirit whisks him off into the wilderness to fast for forty days, alone with no food and no friends or family; just him and God and this new identity of "Son of God."

And he's out there for *forty* days! Who here has ever been camping before? I bet you brought some food with you, right? Has anyone been camping for longer than a week? Two weeks?... Forty days – that's a really long time to be out there alone. Almost six weeks! I can't even imagine how hungry he must have been after all that time.

And then, finally, along comes this tempter who says, So, you're the Son of God, huh? I bet you could do anything you want. I bet you could work magic if you wanted to; you could have all the food you ever wanted, all the money and power and influence – you could *make* everyone worship you!

But he says no. And he doesn't just say, Oh, no thanks, I'm not really *that* hungry – like a good Jewish scholar he steps right up and where this devil quotes scripture at him, he quotes it right back. Where this tempter offers him the opportunity to show off this new power – look at me, I can fling myself off these rocks and God will save me! – Jesus says, that is not what my power looks like.

This devil offers him wealth and power and influence – because isn't that what we *all* want? – and instead of just shrinking back into the hills and quietly going back to his fasting, he raises his voice and says, No! That is not what *I* want, and that's not what God wants!

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Our temptations are a little different than that. We aren't asked to turn stones into bread or take spectacular dives off buildings – but what Jesus' very particular temptations have in common is that they're opportunities to brag about being the Son of God. To do tricks just to impress people, to use his special talents to hoard money and buildings make people respect him out of fear. These are temptations of selfishness, of pride, vanity... these are temptations that we all face, aren't they.

And they're temptations that feed on our knowledge of who we are. We grasp at tricks and dominance and trying to show we're better than someone else when those demonic voices in our head have started to plant doubt and fear. The voices say "you're not smart enough," and so to prove them wrong we feel like we have to put someone else down.

Well, I'm smarter than *her*, right? So I *must* be worth something! Right?

... right?

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So, who are you? That's the question, always, isn't it?

The world tells us we're not strong enough or smart enough or pretty enough, and so we're mean and awful to each other to prove it. To prove we're worth something.

And at the same time, the church has taught us (along with the world, sometimes) that we're sinful, we're not fasting enough, we should deny our bodies and our humanity in order to be holy enough. We should only think about other people, never ourselves. Especially as women, we get this from both sides.

So who are you? You are a child of God.

When we choose the identity of "child of God," we can be strong and secure – courageous and confident – in our character as good creations of God, and we can choose to do what we know is right because we know who we are. We can choose good food rather than bread made of stones. We can choose girl scout cookies and support girls learning exactly how strong they are.

We choose who we want to be, and we can choose what path we follow. We can choose God's way of justice and love and equality and strength, and we can say No to those things that work against God's way.

In this season we put aside those things that distract us, that make us doubt our identity and doubt that God loves us. We practice saying No to the voices in our heads that tell us God could never love us because we're sinful and weak, and even when we're scared, we can say with strong voices, "I am a child of God!"

Let's try it out. Say it with me: I am a child of God. I am a child of God.

I am a child of God!