

On the mind of the Rev. Dr. Nathaniel Jung-Chul Lee

The literary climax of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* is a poem entitled 'The Grand Inquisitor,' in which Ivan—who is one of the Karamazov brothers—presents a startling challenge to the Christian idea of God. In the poem, Ivan imagines that it is the 16th century, and Jesus has come back to earth during the Catholic Inquisition. Jesus is brought before the Cardinal Grand Inquisitor himself, who argues that Jesus had been wrong to resist the devil during his temptation in the wilderness. More specifically, the Cardinal says that by resisting temptation the way he had, Jesus created the possibility for human freedom—a reality that has plagued humanity ever since. Humanity would have been better off, he says, had Jesus given them security instead of freedom.

Regarding the second temptation specifically (Matt. 4:6), the Grand Inquisitor asks Jesus: "Oh, of course, in this you acted proudly and magnificently, like God, but mankind...could you possibly have assumed, even for a moment, that mankind...would be strong enough for such a temptation?...[A]s soon as man rejects miracles, he will at once reject God as well, for man seeks not so much God as miracles. And since man cannot bear to be left without miracles, he will go and create new miracles for himself, his own miracles this time, and will bow down to the miracles of quacks."

One of the things that makes Ivan's poem so disturbing is that he is right, in so far as he goes. Indeed, a century and a half later, living as we are in an age where we worship—that is, give our hearts and our resources to—idols created through consumeristic technologies (the miracles of the modern marketplace), Dostoevsky appears altogether prescient. For in longing for these signs, we have sacrificed our freedom to the endless cycle of production of consumption. Chasing after these chimeras, we have become enslaved by them.

The church is not exempt from this. In fact, we are at times the worst offenders. So, Dostoevsky has his Cardinal go so far as to say that, from the time that Jesus made his fatal error, the church has been in the secret service of Satan—working on his behalf to protect the world from the freedom that Jesus gave them. In our day, we portend to offer the world these sorts of signs—in their various forms—in an act of self-preservation, aiming to stay relevant to a world now full of competing gods. Yet in doing so, we have subverted our most basic relationship to God, making ourselves the “tester,” and he the one “tested.”

But Lent offers a powerful corrective to this. To a world captivated by the spectacle, and a world whose hope is placed in great shows of authority and power, Lent calls us to the humility and weakness of the cross. That is, between false ideas of both freedom and power, Lent trains us to set aside the temptation to test God—the God in whose service, the Book of Common Prayer tells us, is perfect freedom.

TODAY AFTER CHURCH!

12:30 to 1:00 p.m. Bring your coffee and grab a seat near the front of the church for a roundtable discussion with the preacher about the sermon. This will be a time when you can ask questions, give feedback, and in general, help us all to deepen the conversation that the sermon has only just begun.

CONFIRMATION AND INQUIRERS' CLASS – Wednesday, March 23

7:00 to 8:00 p.m. Our yearly Confirmation and Inquirers' Class continues in the Parish House (and also on Zoom) with "The Bible: Context and Content." All are welcome, even if you aren't registered for the entire class. Email the Rev. Adrian Dannhauser at adannhauser@churchoftheincarnation.org with any questions.

FREEING JESUS BOOK DISCUSSION – Thursday, March 24

7:00 to 8:00 p.m. Our Lenten Book Discussion on *Freeing Jesus* continues in the Parish House (and also on Zoom). Parishioner Susan Ridgeway will lead this week's discussion on chapter 3, Jesus as Savior. All are welcome, even if you haven't read the book. Email the Rev. Adrian Dannhauser with any questions.

SAVE THE DATE – Family Friday, April 8

Parents and children of all ages are invited to Family Friday on April 8 from 5:30 to 8:00 p.m. We'll gather in the Assembly Hall for a family friendly service project, pizza dinner, and creation of a 'Hosanna' banner for Palm Sunday, April 10. After the banner is complete, we'll head down to the church for a scavenger hunt with prizes!

One of our teen acolytes will carry the banner in the Palm Sunday procession, in which all children are invited to participate. We'll have extra big palms for them to wave in this year's procession! Email the Rev. Adrian Dannhauser to RSVP for Family Friday.

LENTEN DRIVE FOR BABY SUPPLIES

Throughout Lent, we are collecting baby supplies — diapers, formula, food, wipes, etc. — for Hour Children, an organization that helps incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women and their children successfully rejoin their communities. Pick up a flyer in the Narthex and scan the QR code to access Incarnation's Hour Children Amazon storefront. Purchase from the list of needed supplies online or drop off baby supplies at the church.

EVERY WEEK AT INCARNATION

Sunday Bible Study: Bible Study is held in the Parish House (and via Zoom) on Sundays from 10:00 to 10:30 a.m. We generally follow the Yale Bible Study program, which offers course materials on select books of the Bible, deepened by insights from Yale Divinity School professors.

Sunday School for Children: During the 11:00 a.m. service, children ages 3 to 10 depart the service with their teachers for Sunday School in the Parish House. (All teachers have been vaccinated.) They return before the end of worship. See our website, churchoftheincarnation.org, for more information on Children and Family Ministries.

Wednesday Holy Eucharist: Join us each Wednesday at 12:15 p.m. for this Rite I spoken service of Holy Eucharist, which includes a brief homily and organ music.

Thursday Candlelight Communion: Join us each Thursday at 6:15 p.m. for Candlelight Communion, a service of Holy Eucharist that incorporates chant and silence as well as elements of contemporary worship. This service is informal and contemplative, with music led by a Cantor and a brief reflection by one of the clergy. You can also stream this service at youtube.com/churchoftheincarnation.

Daily Office: Services of Morning Prayer, Noonday Prayer and Compline are held via Zoom. To view the weekly schedule, go to churchoftheincarnation.org/worship.

To receive access information for offerings held via Zoom, join our email distribution list by filling out the yellow Connect Card found in your pew or signing up through our website.