

Ash Wednesday, February 22, 2023

Recommended readings: p.2, "August 1619," and p.3, "The White Lion"

"The 1619 Project" takes its name from the event described on page two of the book. In August of the year 1619, "A ship arrives near Point Comfort, a coastal port in the English colony of Virginia, which was founded twelve years earlier. The 'White Lion' carries some twenty to thirty captive Africans, who are traded to the Virginia colonists for provisions, making them the first enslaved Africans in the English colonies that will become the United States."

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards 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."...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...Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" (Matthew 4:1-10)

The tradition of a forty-day season of reflection and penitence is based upon the story of Jesus fasting and being tested by the devil in the wilderness for "forty days and forty nights." Jesus is tested regarding how he will live into his identity as the Son of God. In August of 1619, the people of the Virginia colony were tested regarding how they would live into their identities. They choose to treat some of their fellow human beings as property. For more than 400 years, the people of the United States have lived with and tried to undo the harm caused by this particular "original sin."

Prayer

O God, the Creator of a universe filled with diversity, forgive us for our choice to value some of your human children less. Help us to learn from the mistakes of our forebears, not so that we can be consumed by guilt and shame, but so that we can help to restore the original beauty and glory of creation. Amen.