

Sermon Note: How Big is Your Fish?

First Sunday in Lent

Introduction

We live in a world where bigger is often considered better. Whether it's the biggest catch, the grandest adventure, or the most impressive achievement, there's a constant temptation to make things seem larger than life—even if reality tells a different story. Social media has made this easier than ever, allowing us to present carefully curated versions of ourselves, exaggerating the highlights while downplaying the ordinary.

But this isn't a new struggle. The desire to be seen as more impressive, more accomplished, or more important has always been part of human nature. The question is: Why? Why do we feel the need to make the fish bigger than it actually is?

This week, as we begin our #JesusTrending Lenten journey, we'll explore the temptation to exaggerate—our stories, our accomplishments, even our identities. Through scripture, reflection, and humor, we'll consider what it means to embrace authenticity over embellishment, substance over spectacle, and truth over illusion.

Illustration Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iowNPiw6uw0>

This clip from *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (2013) humorously captures the temptation to exaggerate our stories and imagine a larger-than-life version of ourselves.

Why This Video?

This clip from *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* humorously illustrates the human tendency to exaggerate, embellish, or daydream about a more exciting version of ourselves. Walter, a reserved office worker, misinterprets a question and then mentally escapes into a grand fantasy of being a daring, romantic explorer. Meanwhile, his co-workers notice his zoning out and mock him before snapping him back to reality with a paperclip. This moment mirrors the ways we can be tempted to "inflate" our own image—whether through social media, storytelling, or simply how we present ourselves to others. Like Walter, we sometimes get caught up in how we want to be perceived rather than embracing our authentic selves.

Video Discussion Questions

1. What was Walter's initial reaction when he thought the question was directed at him?
2. How did Walter's daydream contrast with his actual reality in the office?
3. Why do you think Walter's imagination took such an exaggerated turn?
4. What emotions or insecurities might have influenced his fantasy?
5. How did Walter's co-workers react to his zoning out, and what does that tell us about perception vs. reality?
6. Have you ever found yourself embellishing a story or imagining a more exciting version of an event?
7. What are some common ways people today "inflate" their image or experiences for approval?

8. How does social media contribute to the temptation to present a curated or exaggerated version of our lives?
9. What are the risks of getting too caught up in our own “Walter Mitty moments” instead of embracing our authentic selves?
10. How can we practice being more honest and content with who we truly are in everyday life?

Luke 4:1-13 (CEB)

¹Jesus returned from the Jordan River full of the Holy Spirit, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.

²There he was tempted for forty days by the devil. He ate nothing during those days and afterward Jesus was starving. ³The devil said to him, “Since you are God’s Son, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.”

⁴Jesus replied, “It’s written, People won’t live only by bread.”

⁵Next the devil led him to a high place and showed him in a single instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶The devil said, “I will give you this whole domain and the glory of all these kingdoms. It’s been entrusted to me and I can give it to anyone I want. ⁷Therefore, if you will worship me, it will all be yours.”

⁸Jesus answered, “It’s written, You will worship the Lord your God and serve only him.”

⁹The devil brought him into Jerusalem and stood him at the highest point of the temple. He said to him, “Since you are God’s Son, throw yourself down from here; ¹⁰for it’s written: He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you ¹¹and they will take you up in their hands so that you won’t hit your foot on a stone.”

¹²Jesus answered, “It’s been said, Don’t test the Lord your God.” ¹³After finishing every temptation, the devil departed from him until the next opportunity.

Scripture Study Questions

Before addressing these questions, read Luke 4:1-13 (above) and Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

(<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2091%3A1-2%2C%209-16&version=CEB>)

1. What are the different ways the devil tested Jesus in the wilderness? How did Jesus respond?
2. Jesus didn’t face these tests on his own power. The text says that Jesus “was led by the Spirit in the wilderness.” What are some ways we experience God’s guiding Spirit in our lives?
3. Jesus’ answer to the devil’s first test is “one does not live by bread alone.” In other words, living is more than satisfying our basic needs or our needs for comfort and security. How does following Jesus invite us into “more and better life than we ever dreamed of”? (John 10:10)
4. As a final test, the devil uses the promises of supernatural protection in Psalm 91 against Jesus. But Psalm 91 doesn’t promise us a life without trouble (v. 15), does it? With his answer, Jesus invites the devil to join him in trusting God in all things. How do we experience God’s rescue during trouble?
5. Verse 13 closes on this note: “he [the devil] departed from him until an opportune time,” which signals to the reader that more tests are ahead for Jesus. How do tests and temptations take on different forms throughout our lives?

6. Both Jesus and the devil quote Scripture. In response to temptation, Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy, but it is not enough to know scripture. The devil, who quotes from Psalm 91, also knows scripture. What are helpful guardrails for us in our use of scripture?
7. Our faith reminds us of God's constant and unconditional love. In the spirit of Psalm 91, how can you remind yourself and others this coming week that no circumstance can separate us from that love?

Additional (Optional) Questions

One of the optional questions references "Rise Up" by Andra Day. You can listen to the song here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmHfo_3EGFA

1. What are some of the promises God makes in Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16? How do these verses describe God's protection and care?
2. In Psalm 91, what do you think it means to "dwell in the shelter of the Most High" and to "rest in the shadow of the Almighty"? How might this image help us understand God's presence?
3. In Rise Up by Andra Day, the lyrics speak about pushing forward despite struggles. How does the message of the song relate to the ideas of faith and trust found in Psalm 91?
4. Think about a difficult time that someone you know has experienced. How might the words of Psalm 91 or the lyrics from Rise Up have encouraged them to keep going? When giving support, which do you think matters more—words or actions?
5. Psalm 91 refers to God rescuing and protecting. We're skipping ahead in the Easter story, but how does our church understand Jesus' death and resurrection as part of rescuing or protecting humanity?
6. Rise Up has lyrics about lifting others up in times of struggle. Can you connect those lyrics and how Jesus cared for people, even in his suffering?
7. Some people might struggle with Psalm 91 because it sounds like a guarantee of protection, yet we still experience suffering. How can we try to make sense of that scripture in light of the reality of challenges in life?
8. Do you think faith is more about waiting for God's protection or actively stepping out and trusting God, even in the unknown? Why?

Weekly Action

This week, take time to reflect on how you present yourself to others—whether in conversations, social media, or personal interactions. Are there ways you're tempted to "make the fish bigger" to seek validation or approval? Write down one area where you struggle with authenticity and pray over it throughout the week. If you feel comfortable, talk with a trusted friend about what practicing authenticity could look like in your daily life.

Prayer

O God, in moments of uncertainty and testing, we choose to lean on your faithfulness and trust in the leading of your Spirit. Help us find peace in knowing that when we call to you, you will answer us and be with us in every time of trouble.