

Sermon for Lent 1C
Sunday, March 6, 2022
“Tempted and Tested?”

Text: Luke 4:1-13

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

What is a temptation? Is it simply the desire or urge to do something unwise or even something evil? Temptations are alluring, compelling, desirous, satisfying, easy to succumb to, and hard to resist. We can all think of a time when we were tempted, can't we? Every Lent I abstain from eating meat and fish, and from drinking alcohol, and inevitably, something comes up during that time, like a party or a dinner invitation or St. Patrick's Day, when I feel tempted to cheat and have something “just this once” or because it's a special occasion. Trying to resist temptation is a common part of the human experience; it's great when we have the willpower to overcome a temptation, but sometimes the urge is too great, and we give in. Thank God we have the actions of Jesus to guide us. We have in our gospel lesson today an example of Jesus resisting temptation—and doing a pretty good job of it, too!—to remind us that we mustn't rely on our own power, but on God's.

Immediately after his baptism when a voice from heaven declared him to be the Son of God, Jesus found himself alone in the wilderness. There, he was tempted by the devil. The front of our bulletins this morning shows a picture of the fallen angel trying to dodge as Jesus shows his willpower, but the devil that Jesus faced was probably not an impish looking being with bat's wings, horns, and a pitchfork; rather, he was probably facing some kind of inner struggle between desire and duty. Having eaten little or nothing for forty days, he was undoubtedly famished. The desire for food must have been enormous! I've been to the Judean desert just outside Jerusalem where Jesus would likely have gone. It is dry, has little vegetation now, and is often hot beyond comprehension. But one of the unusual features of it is that the rocks are shaped like large loaves of bread. If it had been me, and I had the power, I sure would have turned those stones into a nice loaf of sourdough and while I was in a bread conjuring mood, I'd have conjured up some olive oil or butter to go with it! In other words, I would have taken the matter into my own hands and succumbed to my own will.

The struggle that Jesus was going through was not about willpower, it was about purpose. His struggle in the wilderness wasn't simply a test to see if he could resist the taunts of the devil; Jesus was being put to the test to help him clarify his mission on earth as the Son of God. The Jewish understanding of who or what Satan was was that he served as an accuser, a supernatural entity that tested humanity; remember the story of Job in which Satan and God had a conversation that resulted in Satan testing Job. The story of today's Gospel told in its original language of Greek says exactly that: Jesus's temptation was really a test, a test to see if he understood his mission here among humans, or if he was going to take the easy way out. That's why he wouldn't just force

us to love him or worship him like the devil urged him to do. Heck! He certainly could have chosen the easy path. He was out there alone; nobody was looking. What difference would it make? A lot. See, this desert experience would test a human Jesus as to whether he would take the easy way out and abuse his divine power. In the desert, it was just a matter of satisfying his hunger pains with bread. But one day, his pain would be the agony of nails in his hands and feet as he hung on a cross. Would he take the easy way out then when the redemption and salvation of humanity was at stake? No. Because he knew that his power was not by using his divinity to take the easy way out, but to endure the struggle, face the ultimate end, make it look as if the battle was lost and the forces of evil won. Then he would rise triumphantly, showing his divine power in glorious majesty! The temptations were ways to hone his ability to handle what life had in store for him.

That's the message for us today as we confront the temptations of our own lives. When we are tempted, we are being tested, and our strength in resisting temptation helps to hone our ability to handle whatever life has in store for us. Giving up something for Lent helps strengthen us for that. Our struggle of self-denial in whatever form that might take, our struggle in resisting the immediate satisfaction of our wants and desires that may shape our temptation reminds us not to take matters into our own hands, but that we are to depend on God to get us through the struggles of life. There is no easy way out for us; we don't have the divine power that Jesus had—and he chose not to even use it! We must rely on his divine power to help us win our battles over Satan. We must rely on his divine power to help us overcome the temptations that we face in our own lives.

Every Friday in Lent we walk the Stations of the Cross. By walking Christ's painful journey in the Stations and by witnessing his majestic victory through the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, we share in our own stories of how God's grace gets us through our own lives' struggles. When we let the struggle defeat us, that means the devil has won, but if we overcome the struggle and yield not to its temptations, that means that we've allowed God to help us win.

Think about the struggles you've had in your life. What temptations are you facing now? What's the easy way out? Are you going to take it? What have you learned from your previous struggles and how did they make you stronger to face new life's new struggles? Lent is about confronting our shortcomings, facing our humanity, reorienting ourselves toward God, and knowing that the one who knows our weaknesses in the midst of our being assaulted and tempted by Satan, is mighty to save us. Let me leave you with some sound advice:

Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin.
Each victory will help you some other to win.
Fight faithfully onward; bad language subdue.
Look ever to Jesus. He will carry you through.

Ask the Savior to help you,
Comfort, strengthen, and keep you.
He's willing to aid you;
He will carry you through.

Amen.

Resource

The Rev. Dr. Janet H. Hunt, "Tested," <http://words.dancingwiththeword.com/2016/02/tested.html>