

Lent 1 (C)

Holy Family Episcopal Church

March 9, 2025

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Psalms 91: 1-2, 9-16

Romans 10:8b-13

Luke 4:1-13

“Forty days and forty night, thou wast fasting in the wild. Forty days and Forty nights. Tempted and yet undefiled.”

We have returned again to the Season of Lent- a period of self-denial, fasting, prayer, and alms giving we observe in preparation for Easter. Lent is a season of the church year that follows Epiphany season. It is the time we set aside each year to remember the love of God that is poured out through Christ Jesus on the cross in his death, and also his defeat of death, sin, and Satan. Christ’s death and resurrection brings eternal life for us all. This season has a penitential character, a solemn nature to it. This is to help us remember to be repentant and to remind us of our sins and our mortality.

Lent is forty days long as a reminder of Christ’s forty days in the wilderness, and his defeat of temptation. Here we are reminded that Jesus was also tempted and that he stood firm against Satan. This reminds us that He is our strength against all

temptation in this life and our need for Christ's death on Good Friday. It also reminds us why we have a character of penance in the season of Lent; we are in need of redemption from sin, death and evil.

It is the first Sunday in Lent and it seems as if Advent was just a few days ago, at least to me. During Advent and Christmas seasons, we are confronted with the scandal of the Incarnation: the wonderful and terrifying news that God entered our humanity in a specific place, at the designated time, in the form of a particular man -Jesus of Nazareth. We hardly had time to catch our breath when Epiphany arrived and we watched with wonder as the reality of Incarnation was acknowledged by the by the wise of this world, the magi. and by the unorthodox within the religious community, John of the wilderness, a.k.a. John the Baptizer. We stood in awe as Jesus emerged from the waters of the Jordan River to hear the words that would set him apart, while at the same time plunging him into the sufferings and joys of daily living - the thundering words spoken at his baptism, *"You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased."*

How can one hear these words and not feel frightened or ready to run away? The evangelists tell us that Jesus decides to withdraw for a while. He goes to the wilderness to think upon these words and their meaning -they would affect the rest of his life. We know almost nothing of his previous years- most assume he worked with Joseph in the carpenter shop in Nazareth and studied the Torah with the other boys and young men in his community, but it is obvious at his baptism that he had spent them obeying and acting upon the will of God. Otherwise, these crucial

words would not have been uttered: “*With you I am well pleased.*” So, we come to the Three Temptations in the wilderness, the beginning of both his ministry and the start on the road that would lead to crucifixion. Matthew and Luke tell us that the spirit led Jesus to the wilderness.

Now, we enter Lent with a strong awareness of the incarnation, and of the humanity of Jesus. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews testifies that Jesus was tempted in every way just as we are. The vivid metaphors of those days in the wilderness show that he was tempted in the most intense manner possible. “*He empties himself,*” St. Paul wrote to the Philippians, “*taking the form of a slave.*” Jesus responds to the most powerful temptations that can be aimed at a human being by taking the form of a slave.

We don’t know exactly what 40 days actually means because this number is so common in the writings of the times and so embedded in the Hebrew stories. The big ones are:

- Noah and his animal friends on the ark experienced 40 days and 40 nights of rain, and

-Moses was on Mt. Sinai 40 Days and 40 nights getting the 10 Commandments.

So obviously, it was a considerable span of fasting and of profound thinking and wrestling. The evangelist tells us that at the end of the fasting period he was “**famished**”. In that weakened state, he is offered the temptation of using his exceptional powers for magic and his own benefit. Satan says to

him, *“Turn this stone into bread. Come on, it is easy for you. You are not like everybody else. You can use your remarkable powers to help yourself.”*

A person who is starving will do anything to relieve the pains of hunger. Those who have more than enough to eat find it very difficult to understand the urgency of this need. Starvation is overwhelming because it is life-threatening. Jesus turns temptation on its head by using the Scriptures he must have memorized during the years of his preparation for ministry.

“One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. What good does it do us to take care of all of the body and forget to feed on God’s words?”

The second part of this verse is often neglected; but it is important for us to remember that it was never neglected by Jesus.

How useful it is to be immersed in the words that sustained Jesus. How much would we be helped if we memorized enough of the Bible to sustain us in times of trouble in temptation? The pattern of his ministry emerges; in each instance he rejects the easy way the magic if you will, by feeding on the words of the holy scripture that he understood so fully.

The second temptation is one that every politician today would fail miserably: the chance to be given authority and power in exchange for worshiping power, greed, human pride and arrogance. The culture of the developed world worships money,

power, and guns. It is a culture passionately adopted by those who long for similar power. Someone suggested that the money spent on one airplane intended for a war could educate every college student in America for years to come. If this isn't idolatry, it is hard to figure out what this temptation means. We see people selling their souls for power while children are shot, starving, made sick by contaminated water, or drowned in the seas while their families try to escape bombing and destruction. The list of offenses is unending, but the answer that Jesus provides takes us back to the original commitment to worship the one God, the Creator. Imagine a world where the leaders prayed constantly, ***"Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."*** Following the wilderness, Jesus would spend the rest of his short life turning aside from all temptation to put his self first. Even when someone calls him good he says, "No one is good except the Father." At every instance of living, he was connected to his father by prayer and because of that he did not falter. People marveled at Jesus' authority, but he knew that he acted only on God's authority.

The third temptation is even more intriguing because the tempter, Satan, the devil, whichever name you prefer for the power that opposes God, uses scripture to accomplish his purpose. Listen to the pundits and the false prophets, to those who make money by taking advantage of the poor, listen to them and hear how they to use scripture to accomplish their dark purposes. *"Take a chance with your life,"* the tempter says to Jesus. *"No matter what chances you take, God is supposed to take care of you. You are a favorite of God's, aren't you?"* There is a tendency in all of us to bargain with God and a great temptation to miss use scripture for our own purposes. Out of such a misuse wars have

arisen. Jesus is adamant on this: **you shall not put God to the test!**

Both Matthew and Mark agree that when, finally, the terrible temptations are finished and the temperature has left him alone he did so only for a while. *“Until an opportune time,”* Luke writes. Because of the incarnation, Jesus would be tempted again. There is that heartbreaking time when Peter tries to dissuade him from following the road that would lead to his death. After all, the tradition did not say anything about the Messiah suffering and dying! But Jesus hears in Peter's rebuke, the echo of Satan's temptation; *“I have the authority, I will give it to you.”* Once again Jesus turns away from the temptation, from his good friend, knowing that his own way of obedience to God would lead to his early death.

This is how the season of Lent begins, with the victory of Jesus over temptation. The knowledge that he belongs to God and God alone keeps him from succumbing to any thought that he might that rely on his own power alone. The knowledge of Scriptures, of the word of the Lord, as Jesus describes them, becomes a shield to protect him from the meddling of the tempter. Jesus' connection is never torn because, in prayer, he always turns to God. May it also always be so with us. Amen