

## Sermon for the First Sunday in Lent

Isn't it true that temptations come looking for us? They are always there at every turn. Do you recognize them in the temptations that are set before Jesus? In a real sense, they are all temptations to take control of our own lives—to set our on goals and objectives without God in mind. Isn't self-fulfillment or self-satisfaction more important than self-giving obedience to what God wants for us?

Temptations are often very subtle. Sometimes they come as things that seem demand our attention. Temptations assault us in what seem to be innocent moments, and at other times they make blatant assaults on our faith.

While Satan left Jesus alone for a time after the encounter in the desert, the temptations of the desert would echo throughout his ministry. Jesus feeding thousands of people would become the tempter's words spoken through the people who were fed: They ask him to be king. People pursue him as a miracle worker. They see how powerfully God works through him.

In the end, there is another taunt about throwing himself down from a high place: "Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God." Again an echo is heard: "Throw yourself down, for it is written. 'He will command his angels concerning you.'" You see, on the face of it, Satan is telling Jesus the truth. Jesus would be under constant pressure to take up the powers of this earth to accomplish his purposes. The people looked for and yearned for one who would throw off the yoke of Rome. Even his disciples, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at you left in your glory." On Palm Sunday we see the tempter in all the hosannas. "If you will bow down and worship me I will give you all this" is the echoing whisper in all the acclamations.

The cross was the last desert into which he was thrust. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He was driven to the desert immediately after his baptism. And, he was driven to the cross because of what happened in that desert. It was to this desert journey that he was called and in the journey to the cross, we too find our salvation and our call.

It is his faithfulness that is our hope. To Jesus we may turn when we want to reject our calling and as temptations assault us. It is Jesus who taught us to pray "Give us Lord our bread for tomorrow." "Lead us not into temptation." "Deliver us from evil." It is this prayer upon which we fall back when temptations overwhelm us. When we feel

ourselves sliding into the pit of shame and guilt and when we are near despair in our failures to be obedient to God's call, we can pray as he taught us.

So, thank God that Jesus is not the "God said it. I believe it. That settles it!" savior as the tempter wanted him to be. I thank God that Jesus does not believe that every word of scripture is equally applicable to all circumstances. Jesus will not accept out of context any word from Scripture as God's word for him in all circumstances. For Jesus, it's not just about God's truth; it's also about God's time, God's call, and most of all about God's love.

God's word for us today may be one of the hardest words to hear: "WAIT." However, there is no better word for us to start a holy Lent. We are called to wait, and watch, and listen these forty days.

We know the story is headed toward the cross. Yet, we see the cross veiled from our sight just now. We know that we are headed toward the fullest revelation of God's love. But that can't happen here in the desert. It can't happen now, before Jesus' life -- his teaching and healing and freeing people from the powers that bound them -- has testified to the meaning of his death.

Jesus is Lord, beloved of God, but the kind of authority Jesus exercises, the character of the God who calls Jesus God's Son, and the means through which the world will be gathered for the messianic feast are revealed most fully through Jesus' self-giving love and forgiveness. Having resisted the temptation to use God's power and God's gifts to further his own privilege, Jesus is prepared to proclaim with his life the kind of self-giving love, radical openness, and unconditional forgiveness that is the true character of the God of Israel.

Wait! Enter into the tension of Lent, the tension between the now and the not yet. There are always temptations to quote scripture to get our way. We can read the Bible to convince ourselves that we deserve the power and privileges we have or desire. But Jesus shows us a different way. Come in from the desert for a time and be nourished by the Body of Christ. Wrestle together Scripture. Help one another listen for the voice of the Spirit. Be suspicious of voices that suggest that God's power be used to further your own privilege. Instead, turn around, repent and trust Jesus' self-giving love, which is good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, and freedom for the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19). Trust the call to extend Christ's love to others.