

**FIRST LESSON: Deuteronomy 26:1-11**  
**SECOND LESSON: Romans 10:8b-13**  
**THE GOSPEL: Luke 4:1-14**

**The First Sunday in Lent**  
**March 10, 2019**

**“Lenten Reflections: Temptation”**  
**Sermon Preached by Pastor Lowell D. Nelson**  
**American Lutheran Church of Sun City**

Grace, peace and truth be to you through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

I am tempted by food..... I come by it through two forces in my life, very good forces. But sometimes I am enticed to misuse the gift. Food came to me through love, first love was through my mommy. She could make great meals. I learned that mother's love is shown through food, at least one avenue. Boy, did I love my mommy. Secondly, I grew up in a parsonage, I am a preacher's kid. The word smorgasbord is God's word for love. So I learned to be very skilled. I don't know if you have seen me in action, but I will scope out the table, and I will develop a game plan, and I know how to build a strong foundation on the plates that I have so that I can go upward. But the idea of temptation is it takes something that may be good, but entices you to either go too far, entices you to take away your relationship with God, or others. My joke for myself and it's more true than not is I don't know if you know of a place called Old Country Buffet...that was pretty good. If I get into the Old Country Buffet parking lot, it's too late. I have to keep on going. Golden Corral, just keep on going. Because part of temptation is to understand that there are limits and I call them healthy boundaries. That's just practical good sense, isn't it? To not always be up against the edge, but to set a line of defense for those things that tempt you.

I am going to try to take a little different arc about this, which is temptation can be an avenue of learning about yourself. A way to learn about God. A way to learn about others. Sometimes I get nervous when I quote Luther, so Luther, our leading theologian, said things like this, because one thing about being Lutheran, even though I have pietistic roots in my background about being proper and certainly not about drinking or smoking or God forbid, dancing, these things. But we don't come from the faith life that our job is to be perfect. That's a dead end. Perfectionism is a dead end. Luther said it this way. *Whenever the devil harasses you, seek the company of men or drink more, or joke, talk nonsense, or do some other merry thing.* Here's another phrase. *Sometimes we must drink more, recreate ourselves and even sin a little to spite the devil so that we leave him no place for troubling our consciences with trifles. We are conquered if we try to consciously not to sin at all.* When the devil says to you “Do not drink.” Answer him, “I will drink and right freely just because you told me not to.” Amen

I think I need to keep going though just to make sure you don't misunderstand that. You might be tempted to misuse that. You see his point though. Life is not about being on this tightrope where, oh my gosh, I am frozen. Right? No, no, we are called to love God, love each other, and in so doing find the deep love of others and God for ourselves. This idea of

setting healthy boundaries for that which entices you to go off track is important. Luther used a phrase that had been around for many years. *Temptations cannot be avoided, but because we cannot prevent the birds from flying over our heads, there is no need that we should let them nest in our hair.* That's been used over the years, I think it's a good practical way.

I have tried to lead, it's pretty simplistic, but I have tried to lead in a way pastorally, that if you worry, it's an invitation to pray. Anytime you worry, it's an invitation to pray. If you are anxious about anything, it is a time in which to take prayer time and load every anxiety you have and toss it over to God. Cast all your anxiety on God because he cares for you.

For temptation, I am going to have that same encouragement for our congregation and for myself. Which is... if you feel tempted by something, know that it's not the whole truth. Seek the whole truth. Temptations are a way to learn more about God's love and the love of others, including yourself. Let's see if we can test that idea. Luther said it this way, "The devil and temptations give occasion unto us somewhat to learn and understand the scriptures by experience and practice. Without trials and temptations, we could never understand anything, not depth of scripture, even though we have read and heard the same." Luther called temptations for his life his masters in divinity. That as he experienced things that were leading him off the track of the Ten Commandments, upon his commitments to his wife, to his family, of a whole variety of things that we could learn from them. That's my thesis for you. This week as you reflect upon the love of God, as you reflect upon those things that tempt you, tempt you into dangerous acts, realize it's not the whole truth and there's an invitation to go deeper.

The foundation of our scriptures, the Deuteronomy lesson speaks upon this common faith walk that we are wanderers but we have a mighty God. That is a simplistic overstatement of what that story is about, but that is true for all of us. God's love is powerful and everything is given to us by the Lord.

The Second Lesson speaks of something that is not a test, this is not a test. I have heard the Romans text used this way. It's like if you say this, then you'll be saved. That's called decision oriented theology. That's okay, but it doesn't capture our roots, which is – it is God's continual movement towards and with us. Don't forget, when you are tempted, don't deny the foundation of God's love. It's not so much an "if", it's an "as". Confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord, believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, and you will be saved. I don't think so much in the future only, but be healed now. No one who confesses with the mouth and utters these words, no one will be put to shame. This is a current understanding for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord, is and shall be saved. That's the foundation we have. Why do we say that? Because we have a Lord who experienced these temptations.

So let's go into these temptations that Jesus experienced. He experienced this, led by the Spirit 40 days, led into a variety of situations. There are social studies experiments that show

that if you have will power, if you repeatedly ask to exercise that will power, guess what happens. Do you think your will power gets stronger or weaker? You would think stronger, it gets weaker. They can show that, that over time, that if you are put into difficult situations, that it becomes more challenging. So my simple encouragement to you and to me is when you are tired you are vulnerable. That can be tired emotionally, that can certainly be tired physically, and sometimes as we age we feel the tiredness and that can be a prime opportunity for Satan to tempt.

A lot of these temptations come on identity. This question – if you are the Son of God...what a great question. Challenge the identity. You and I are the children of God by the adoption of baptism. That is our position, but temptations come and doubt that if you are a child, if you are a Christian, if you are a person who follows Christ. In this movement towards using scripture to feed it, I wish I could give you a Bible verse for every temptation that will come in your life. But we have resources within the scripture.

First Corinthians 10 says it this way in verse 13. “No temptation has overtaken you, except what is common to mankind, and God is faithful, he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. So when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out.” A way out, but it takes time, doesn’t it? It takes time for the way out. Jesus was tempted then to go and to understand authority for all the world if he would simply worship Satan. But he quotes from Deuteronomy 6 “Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.” And then verses 9 and beyond, he takes them to the top of the temple. The order is a little bit different in Mathew, but it’s the same temptations. “If you are the Son of God,” That is a root for you to understand., you are. The question comes, “if you are”, the temptation comes, “if you are,” and the answer is “You are.”

This leads to a greater understanding of our need for the Lord. A greater understanding for others, because the temptations never tell the whole story. They never tell about the damage you may do to yourself. They never speak of the damage you may do to another. They may not speak of the discomforts that you have that can separate you, at least emotionally, from the love of God. This answer is always the same. If you are, you are. Satan will lift up temptations to you that never are the whole truth. That is the challenge of the tempter. I wanted to share that with you.

If you spend this next week in Lenten reflection, I am encouraging you to take some time to think, and to reflect. And then to share, reflect this love to others. The insights that you have. God’s love is the whole truth. Think about those things that are tempting you, write them down in a safe place, think about them, and think about what it is that you need to learn more about God’s love, your love for others, and the love and self-regard that you have for yourself. Because there is something that is tempting you to learn.

Oscar Wilde said it, he can resist everything except temptation. So he was kind of brilliant, yet lead a very difficult life following that. My hope and dream for you, I want to prove to you that the Lord’s word shares all the truth, the whole truth.

I find it really remarkable that Satan can quote scripture. It's difficult for me to get my head wrapped around, because normally when I hear people quote scripture, there is good intent. But here is a total misuse of the scripture. That last temptation and it sounds so good. "Throw yourself down from the top of the temple because for it is written he will command his angels concerning you, protect you, and on their hands they will bear you up so you will not dash your foot against a stone." That's from Psalm 91, but we just read that Psalm. I am going to anchor it up again. Verses 1 and 2, because those are verses 12 and 13 that Satan has selectively picked out, but that temptation shows you that it is not the whole story.

Here is the whole story. Verses 1 and 2, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, abides under the shadow of the Almighty. He shall say to the Lord 'You are my refuge and my stronghold, my God in whom I put my trust.'" Then in verse 9, "Because you have made the Lord your refuge, and the Most High your habitation." Verse 10, "There shall no evil happen to you, neither shall any plague come near your dwelling." Verse 12, "For he shall give his angels charge over you to keep you in all your ways." Verse 13, "They shall bear you in their hands, lest you dash your foot against a stone." I love verse 14 that Satan left out, he tempted without the whole truth. "You shall tread upon the lion and adder; you shall trample the young lion and the serpent under your feet." I love that because the freedom of movement for we as Christians is not to be perfect, but to step forward in faith. And then verses 15, 16, and 17 take the voice and they are no longer human, but God's commitment and promise to us. God says, "Because he is bound to me in love, therefore will I deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him; I am with him in trouble; I will rescue him and bring him to honor. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation." Now that's the whole truth. That's what Satan is against.

My encouragement for you and I is to take the temptations, yes, healthy boundaries. Yes, don't dwell upon them. I'll throw a shout out for us who use cell phones, sometimes this beautiful tool can be a temptation in itself, what can be accessed. So don't carry it with you at all times. That's common sense to take a break and to set up healthy boundaries. As you see me go past the Golden Corral, just give me a special shout out. "Thank you pastor for not stopping in there." Pray for me and our buffets and smorgasbords. But this encouragement that any temptation is an invitation to learn more about God's love. You can get your own masters in divinity by understanding that temptations are not the sin themselves. Don't fall for it, the whole story is that God loves you. If you are, you are. You are children of God. This is the foundation of our life. Amen