

1st Sunday in Lent
"The Strength to Resist Temptation"
Matthew 4:1-11

This morning I'm going to talk to you about the First Temptation, the temptation that faced Adam and Eve. I'm going to relate that to the temptation Jesus faced in the wilderness. And then I'll talk about how both of those events relate to you and me.

In our first reading from Genesis, chapter 2, we have the story of the first temptation. Adam and Eve are in the Garden of Eden enjoying the gift of God's beautiful creation. And we hear that God has created only one prohibition. There was only one command God asked them to follow. Do you remember what it was?

God said, "You may eat freely of every tree in the garden, except, you may not to eat from the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And do you remember why?"

That tree reminded Adam and Eve who the Creator was and that they were a part of His creation. And yet Adam and Eve fell for Satan's lie. The devil deceived them into believing that by eating of that tree they would become like God.

That was the first temptation.

And that is still the number one temptation we all face, that we can be like God, that we don't need God, that we are in charge and can carry on just fine, all on our own.

The first temptation in the Garden is ultimately a story of how the devil tries to trick us in to forgetting who we are. And in the wilderness, that's exactly the approach the devil takes with Jesus.

Three times he attempts to make Jesus forget his identity.

"If you are the Son of God command those stones to become loaves of bread."

Notice the devil does not say, "because you are the Son of God", perform this miracle. Instead the devil tries to cast doubt. The Devil tries to be crafty and he takes a good thing like bread and tries to convince Jesus that performing a little miracle to satisfy his hunger would be okay. After all, who could argue with the need for food?

Think of what the world would be like if we had the ability to turn stones into bread? Yet, Jesus tells Satan that we don't live by bread alone, but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God.

And so the Devil keeps trying. By the way he does that with us too. If we turn back temptation once or twice he just keeps trying.

In the second temptation, he says to Jesus,

“If you are the Son of God throw yourself down from the temple.”

But Jesus will not be swayed.

He tells the Devil, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”

In the third temptation, the devil offers Jesus political power, all the kingdoms of the world. And can't political power be used wisely? Power to do good, power to change the world for the better.

Wouldn't evangelism be easier if we had the power to turn stones into bread, if we had some undeniable, miracle that we could perform?

Every once in a while I read about a place where someone has seen a vision of the Virgin Mary. And people by the thousands, and hundred's of thousands make a pilgrimage to visit the shrine where this vision took place.

I know a lot of people put their faith in these visions but I always wonder

“Is that how God works?”

“Would God want us to rest our faith on some miracle?”

At Mount Sinai, when Moses went up to talk to God, he came back with the Ten Commandments, God's law for God's chosen people.

But the people didn't wait for Moses to come down the mountain.

Instead, they made for themselves a golden idol, a god more to their liking, a god they could control.

What they had done was to attach their faith to an object.

They attached it to something other than God himself.

But that's exactly what Satan wants us to do, to worship something, anything except God.

Like I shared in the children's sermon this morning, Satan promises a lot of things.

It sounds great to be promised everything we desire.

But we soon realize that Satan fails to deliver on those promises.

And we find out from Jesus that God's plans for us are always better.

When Jesus fends off Satan's temptations, you might notice that he quotes Scripture from the book of Deuteronomy, the book of Israel's laws, the Ten Commandments for everyday life.

The Ten Commandments help us fend off temptation

because they turn our attention to the needs of others, rather than just our own.

We believe that God cares about us, that God does meet our needs. Yet we also believe that God can change our needs, and give us ones we didn't even know we had. Not everything we think we want is truly life-giving or God pleasing.

And so God always opens us up to look beyond our own needs and to consider the needs of our neighbors.

That's what the last 7 commandments are all about, ordering life so that our neighbor's basic needs are served and protected.

- Honor Your Father and your Mother.
- Do Not Kill
- Do not commit adultery
- Do not steal
- Do not bear false witness against your neighbor
- And don't covet anything that is your neighbors.

When we try to be God, or pretend that we don't need God, our families and neighbors are the first ones to suffer.

But when we find our life in Christ, His Spirit gives us the strength to resist temptation. Instead of being tempted to forget "who we are" and "whose we are" Jesus helps us to see life more clearly. The more time we spend with Jesus, the more we become like Him.

And that's really what I'd like you to take home from this message.

The purpose of our lives is to glorify God in all things. Temptation is the way Satan tries to get us to stumble and fall and lose the opportunity to give God glory to lose our witness.

So the key to fighting temptation is to not try to fight it by your own strength but instead to let Jesus win the battle as He works in you and through you.

That's why leaning on and trusting Jesus during times of testing makes so much sense. No one else but Jesus could say, "I have faced the full strength of the enemy. So when you face your own temptations, rely on Me."

"I have the power you will need to remain strong.
"Receive the presence of my Holy Spirit. And don't forget who you are.
You are my beloved Son or Daughter! My Grace is sufficient for you." Amen.