

Luke 4:1-13
Deuteronomy 26:5-10

2/14/16—Lent 1C

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-10a, 11-12, 14-16
Romans 10:8b-13

Tempted?

I have a confession to make. A few years ago, your pastor was tempted. It happened toward the end of a Sunday fellowship meal at a church I was serving. *Someone* in that congregation had baked a chocolate cake. A rich, moist, sinfully delicious chocolate cake with chocolate frosting.

Oh, but my intentions had been good that day. I had gone straight past all the tasty dishes on the main course table. And was heading for the drink table, planning to have only ice water. Well. The dessert table had been place *way* close to the drink table. And right there in front of me stood the delectable remains of this chocolate cake. Calling my name!

It took only a split second. I yielded to temptation that fast. In one quick pass by the dessert table, I scooped up a handful of crumbs, inelegantly shoved them into my mouth, and kept right on walking. With telltale evidence on my fingers and face.

Now, I know that—due to caffeine sensitivity—I should stay away from chocolate. Due to its high caffeine content, chocolate isn't a good thing to put into my body. But I did it anyway. And I wasn't even that hungry!

But today in Luke's Gospel, we hear that Jesus *was* hungry. Very hungry. Starving hungry. Luke tells us that immediately after the baptism of Jesus, the Spirit leads him into the wilderness. Where for forty days he eats *nothing*. Where hunger weakens him. Where he's tempted.

We like to think of Jesus as *always* being strong. But in the wilderness, he becomes vulnerable. Vulnerable to all that the adversary throws at him.

Jesus knows that temptation is real. Because he's been there. When he teaches us how to pray, he invites us to ask God not to bring us to the time of trial. Not to *lead* us into temptation. But Jesus knows that you and I *will* face temptation. Because we live in the world. And Jesus knows what this world is like.

It's the same world in which Jesus gets tempted to transform stones into bread. You and I, too, are tempted to take the hard, rocky places we encounter in this life and somehow, as we deal with them, make bread to feed us—just us, no one else!—all by our very own selves. We live in a society that prizes self-reliance and self-sufficiency. A society that urges us to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and stand on our own two feet. A society that encourages us not to depend on anyone or need anyone. But Jesus knows the

depth of our need for God. Jesus knows just how deep is our need for a savior. And he knows that idols cannot save us.

Jesus lived in a world in which people worshiped and served all kinds of different gods. And Jesus knows that we too live in an idolatrous world in which people worship and serve all kinds of different gods. Gods named power. And prestige. And money. Gods named youth. And beauty. And celebrity.

When Jesus is tempted to worship another, he reminds the enemy—and he reminds us—that there is but one God to be worshiped. There is only one God to be served. Worshiping or serving any other separates us from God. And whatever separates us from God is sin.

God's Son was without sin. He was tested as we are, the Scriptures tell us, *yet [he was] without sin*. Knowing what the church confesses about Jesus' nature—both fully divine and fully human—what amazes us most about his being without sin is not that he was *incapable* of committing sin. What astonishes us is that he was able to resist the *temptation* to sin.

For Jesus was just as human as you and I are. And he was subject to every temptation that you and I are. But no temptation that ever confronted Jesus was greater than the temptation to choose

a path that did not lead to a cross. I think that every day of Jesus' ministry—up to and including that long night in Gethsemane—he struggled against all that was pulling him to choose an easier road. The tempter challenges Jesus to test God's promises. To call on God to save him from death in Jerusalem: a death he *will* face, not on the temple's height, but on a dark hill outside the city wall.

We get a glimpse of that Jerusalem hillside as Lent begins. Even though in the world around us, a lot of people have forgotten what Lent is, or don't know its meaning and don't really care, *we* join with Christians across the centuries in observing it. For one of the ways we follow Jesus is in walking with him toward Golgotha through these weeks of Lent.

My brothers and sisters, many believers think of Lent as a serious, sober, somber time. We save our *alleluias* for Easter. We fast after the example of Jesus who fasted. Fasting is all about removing distractions that get in the way of being opened into a more faith-filled prayer life, into a deepening of the relationship for which you and I were created. Surely, Lent is a time of focused preparation, a time for the turning and returning that the Bible calls repentance. A time of turning and *returning* to the Holy One who is at the very center of our lives.

And to do that, we may need for a time to be in wilderness. Some of us think of Lent as forty days of barren wilderness, not only for Jesus, but also for us. The wilderness may be a place where we don't want to go. But—for us—it can be a place of cleansing, a place of learning how to live anew. In the wilderness, if you listen closely, you might just hear good news!

In the scripture texts for this first Sunday in Lent, you *do* hear good news. From Moses, you hear the good news of a land of promise, a land flowing with milk and honey. From the psalmist, you hear the good news that the Most High is your stronghold and your refuge; that the Almighty protects and delivers and rescues you. And I can't think of any better news than the news Paul has for the Romans and for us. It's this: if you confess that Jesus is Lord, you will be saved.

It sounds so simple, doesn't it? Making that confession sounds simpler than it is. When many of us were kids, we watched westerns on TV and at the movies. Rawhide. Gunsmoke. The Lone Ranger. The bad guys wore black hats. The good guys wore white hats. And usually rode a big white horse! It was easy to tell the good guys from the bad guys.

But the real world confronts us with more complex issues. With situations subtly nuanced in shades of gray. It's not always easy to make truly ethical choices. To discern the greater good.

For in the world outside these doors, all kinds of powers and principalities vie for our loyalty and our allegiance. Do my lips confess one Lord, even as I try to resist the temptation to let my actions betray my words?

Who's *really* lord of my life—and yours? Is Caesar lord? Is wealth lord? Are possessions lord? Is an employer lord? Is the consumer-culture lord? Or is Jesus Lord?

Affirming that Jesus is Lord is a countercultural statement. It was in the first century, when it could get you arrested for treason—charged, tortured, and executed. And still today, affirming that Jesus is Lord is a countercultural statement.

In the vows of baptism, we make profoundly countercultural statements. *We reject the evil powers of this world. We resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves. We confess Jesus Christ...as our Lord.*

And we come to know him as our Lord. Through sacred Scripture you come to know him who *is* God's Word. *The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart.* When Jesus, quoting

scripture, says that *One does not live by bread alone*, he wants you to hear and remember the rest of that scripture. He wants you to understand that *we live by every word that comes from the mouth of God*.

God's Spirit is the One we live by. The Spirit is a helper. The Spirit is an advocate. The Spirit counsels. The Spirit convicts. The Spirit comforts. The Spirit guides. The Spirit reminds you of all that Christ has said. For the Holy Spirit was with Jesus at his baptism. Throughout his ministry. And in the wilderness where Jesus was tempted and where Jesus overcame temptation.

When temptation comes to you—as Jesus knows it will, as John Wesley believed it will to even mature Christians—when temptation comes, you have the presence and the power of God's own Spirit to rely on.

The Holy Spirit that strengthens you and shapes you and readies you to live all your days worshiping God. And serving God alone.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.