

***“The Devil Didn’t Make Me Do It....Facing Our Own Demons”***

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Matthew 4:1-11

The story is told of a woman who called a Presbyterian pastor to inquire about having her beloved dog’s funeral service in the sanctuary of the Presbyterian Church. The conversation went...

Pastor *“Hello, First Presbyterian Church. This is Rev. Bob.”*

Woman: *“Hello, I am calling to see if you would officiate at my beloved dog’s funeral in your sanctuary. I have had this dog for over 15 years and her death has brought me great sorrow....I’m just heart broken and would love to have my dog’s funeral service in your sanctuary.”*

Pastor: *“I’m so sorry to hear about your dog’s death. I know how dogs can become just like family and my heart goes out to you over your loss. However, we don’t allow funerals for pets in our sanctuary. I would suggest that you try the Methodist pastor down the street. They are generally a little looser in the Methodist Church.”*

Woman: *“I’m sorry you won’t be able to officiate but I understand. I’ll call the Methodist pastor. But I have just one more question. Should I offer the Methodist pastor \$400 or \$500 dollars for the service?”*

Pastor: *“Oh, I must not have heard you say your dog was a Presbyterian.”*

It doesn’t matter if you are a pastor, a church member or a non-church member. One thing all human beings have in common is that we *all* face temptation. Being tempted comes with the territory of being human. I don’t know what tempts you but I know you know! And I know what tempts me!

Yet we are encouraged not to take temptation seriously. Some of us remember Flip Wilson’s routine, *“The devil made me do it.”* (If you want a laugh go to YouTube and you’ll find Flip Wilson’s original routine broadcast on the Ed Sullivan Show in January 1970). We scoff at any sense of the reality of spiritual struggle. As Oscar Wilde stated, *“I can resist anything but temptation.”* We dismiss any sense of personal responsibility or that resisting temptation is a part of our faith journey. We find many ways to trivialize temptation!

However, Jesus doesn't make light of temptation. Jesus knows that how we face our temptations is a matter of life and death. Jesus has just been baptized in the Jordan. As he comes out of the baptismal waters he hears God proclaim, "*This is my Beloved with whom I am well pleased.*" That's where we pick up this morning's gospel reading (Matthew 4:1-11)....

**Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.**  
<sup>2</sup>He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. <sup>3</sup>The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." <sup>4</sup>But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" <sup>5</sup>Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, <sup>6</sup>saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" <sup>7</sup>Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" <sup>8</sup>Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; <sup>9</sup>and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." <sup>10</sup>Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" <sup>11</sup>Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him. *The Word of the Lord...*

Jesus is led into the wasteland where even the sea is called "dead" "*to be tempted by the devil.*" If Jesus was tempted, we most certainly can count on facing temptation. I personally believe in a spiritual force that opposes God and God's plans but I also believe that my primary tempter resides within my own mind. Lent is the perfect time for spring cleaning our minds. We can begin by facing and identifying our negative thoughts and personal temptations.

Jesus is famished and he hears a whisper, "**I if you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.**" Jesus had just heard God proclaim "*You are my son, the beloved*" and now a different voice slyly asks, "***If you are God's son....if you are God's son....if you are God's son.***"

Temptation begins in our mind. “*If you are the Son of God....*” Starving hungry, Jesus looks around and sees the stones and rocks and hears the whisper, “turn these stones into bread....stones into bread...stones into bread”. Just do it...*if* you really are the Son of God turn these stones into bread. Treat yourself. You are hungry. Go ahead and satisfy that hunger. Who will be hurt? Why shouldn’t you, as the Son of God, have what you want? Go ahead, satisfy your hunger....stones into bread.

We also struggle with the lure of satisfying our hunger with bread that is here today and gone tomorrow. *What bread tempts you...if I only had \_\_\_\_\_ I would be fulfilled?* .....money, cars, homes, careers, degrees, hobbies, sex, entertainment, sports, food, .....you name it. These things of the world are good...and God knows we need them. But, in the wilderness, Jesus shows us the high road.

Jesus resists the temptation by saying, “**One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.**” This Old Testament passage is worth remembering. One does not live by the bread of the world alone but by the word of God. There is more to life than meets the eye or fills the stomach. Jesus chooses faith and obedience to God over the immediate gratification of bread. He chose listening to God over listening to the whisper that would have derailed his relationship with God and his mission in life.

“**One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.**” Augustine once said, “*Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God!*” Jesus knew that we find our rest....our purpose....our very life in God. Jesus experienced the power of listening to God’s word even while a whisper told him to ignore God’s word. *How are you listening to God’s Word?* Lent is a wonderful time to renew your commitment to regular *worship? Daily scripture reading?* (The Sanctuary for Lent) *Prayer?* (Season of Prayer for Fairmont) *Lenten Study Groups?* I am pleased that we have close to 100 people participating in our *Lenten Study Group* study of Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home. These are all means to help us find our rest in God and stay on the path that leads to eternal life.

The devil, having failed to tempt Jesus into putting his immediate wants before eternal needs, takes Jesus to two high places. First, to the top of the temple where he tempted Jesus to throw himself off to prove that God would save him. And then to the top of a high mountain where the devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and tempted Jesus, by offering these kingdoms to him, if Jesus would simply fall down and worship the devil.

With each of these successive temptations Jesus listens to God's word and resists the temptation by pointing out a higher truth than serving self. ***“Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”*** Jesus knew that the base temptation is independence from God. Like a rebellious teenager, we humans believe we can get along in life just fine...without God. That we are loveable and capable without God. That we can face our struggles, trials and temptations without God. That we don't need God. That God will, in fact, put the kibosh on our fun. So many have run away from home seeking life without God...now that is an oxymoron... “Life without.”

But, in the wilderness, Jesus shows that our true home is found in God. And God yearns for us to come home. As Richard Foster writes, ***“Today the heart of God is an open wound of love. God aches over our distance and preoccupation. God mourns that we do not draw near to him. God grieves that we have forgotten him. God weeps over our obsession with muchness and manyness. God longs for our presence.***

***And God is inviting you and me to come home, to come home to where we belong, to come home to that for which we were created. God's arms are stretched out wide to receive us.***

***For too long we have been in a far country: a country of noise and hurry and crowds, a country of climb and push and shove, a country of frustration and fear and intimidation. And God welcomes us home: home to serenity and peace and joy, home to friendship and fellowship and openness, home to intimacy and acceptance and affirmation.”*** (P. 1)

Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home

May we pray for one another that this Lent all of us will find our True Home in Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth and the life!

Amen