

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, First Sunday of Lent, March 5, 2017

Temptation

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Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7 Matthew 4:1-11

Our scripture readings this morning are all about temptation, two kinds of temptation in strikingly different ways.

In the story about Adam and Eve, the serpent tells Eve to eat the forbidden fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden. God had warned Adam and Eve not to eat from that tree but the fruit looked delicious and Eve was tempted. The serpent clinches the deal by telling her that if she eats the fruit of the tree she “... *will be like God, knowing good from evil.*” Wow! Being like God. That has got to be worthwhile and the fruit looks so good. What harm can there be in eating it. So she does and she gives Adam some of the fruit.

Eating the fruit is often called the “original sin” but it isn’t. It is a symptom of the real sin. It happens because of the real sin which is striving to be like God. The original sin was not eating the fruit.

Rev. Edyth Pruitt at Fairview Presbyterian in Lenoir NC likened it to having a fever. A fever is a symptom. The real problem is whatever disease it is that is causing the fever.

Eve’s sin, her fall from grace, was trying to be like God. The serpent tempted her and she couldn’t resist. The original sin was not realizing that she and Adam were totally under the control of God, just as all of us are.

Ask yourself, in whom do you place your trust --- yourself, your family, your friends, neighbors, politicians, or who else? We are tempted by all manner of things and we tend to put our trust in ourselves or in others. We should be putting our trust in God. He is in control – not us, not our family, not our friends, and certainly not politicians. To ignore God is the original sin, the sin that Eve, and later Adam, committed. We get tempted by many things and often know better but we succumb to temptation. Put your trust in God where it belongs.

Our scripture reading from Matthew is also one about temptation. Jesus spends 40 days in the wilderness and Satan, like the serpent in the garden, does his best to tempt Jesus into becoming like people, rather than relying on the grace of God.

But Jesus holds fast to God's divine calling and Satan fails. Jesus is hungry, very hungry, just as you and I would be under similar circumstances. He has not eaten for 40 days and Satan tells him to feed himself, to make bread. *"Tell these stones to become bread."* You can do it. You are the Son of God. Turn these rocks into loaves of bread.

Jesus responds. *"It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

Strike one Satan.

Then Satan takes Jesus to the top of the temple and says, prove that you are the Son of God. Jump off. It is written, *"He will command his angels ... and they will lift you up in their hands ... "*

Think of that one. If you really trust in God, could you jump off of a cliff or out of an airplane without a parachute and expect God to save you? No, your God-given common sense would take over and you wouldn't do it, but that might not be the case if we are talking about a delicious piece of fruit on a tree within arm's reach.

Jesus said, "Strike two Satan", *"It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test'"*.

Then Satan tries to tempt Jesus with fame, power, and riches. He shows Jesus the kingdoms of the world and tells him that he can have everything if he only bows down and worships Satan.

That is a temptation trap that many humans have fallen into over the years. In our time it has been Adolph Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Osama bin Laden, Mussolini, and others. The temptation for power and glory consumed them and eventually killed them.

Jesus responds, *"Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only."*

Strike three Satan, **you're out.**

Jesus holds fast to God's divine calling but do we do that?

No we don't. We succumb to temptation. Dear Jesus, help me to get this job. Lord help me with this or that, and on and on and on. We try to shape God in our image.

We have to take the responsibility for our choices in life. Our reading from Genesis is about shame and blame. The one from Matthew is the opposite, it is telling us that we are responsible for our choices.

Our Daily Bread has a special introductory issue which is undated but which gives devotions for 60 days. Devotion 58 says in part, *"You can't help but notice the contrast between the landscape in Genesis and Matthew 4. The same tempter who*

once entered God's garden now welcomes God to his turf --- the dangerous, barren wilderness.

"The wilderness can be a picture of what the world --- and life --- becomes when Satan has his way. With one decisive blow, the joy of Eden was replaced with the barrenness of shame. But Jesus was victorious on Satan's turf! In that victory He gives us hope that we too can have a victory. A victory that shows us the enemy no longer holds sway. A victory that assures us that the day is coming when we will no longer toil in Satan's wilderness but will be ushered into heaven, where the joy of Eden will be ours --- forever."

The tempter is still out there. He struck out with Jesus but the game isn't over. Original sin is still out there lying in wait.

We want to know everything. We want to control everything. We are tempted to try.

We need to leave our lives in God's hands.

That is the message of Lent.

Amen.

Note: Scripture quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible, 2011