

Sermon 2.14.16

Pastor Josh Ferris

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent

Deuteronomy 26:1-11 | Psalm 91 | Romans 10:8b-13 | **Luke 4:1-13**

Today's Gospel reading isn't just about temptation. It's about how Jesus *responded* to temptation.

We all know what temptation feels like. Like a pull, a gravitational force towards something that we just *know* isn't good for us, isn't right, isn't what God intends or wants.

All of us feel temptation, *real* temptation. The temptation to pick up the bottle. To click onto the wrong webpage. To take what isn't yours. The temptation to cheat on the test you haven't prepared for. To hurt someone else physically or emotionally. To flirt with the co-worker. To push the boundaries too far. The temptation to lie and cheat to get ahead. To speak evil about someone. To tear down with our words. The temptation to gossip. To get revenge when someone hurts us.

Whether we thought it was the devil – like in this morning's reading – or whether we led ourselves into temptation, we have all experienced temptation in our lives.

It's good to know that even Jesus – the Son of God himself – was tempted. And for Jesus, these temptations came after an incredible high. He had just been baptized. In that moment the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended and a voice spoke and said, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3:22b) It was a big moment for him. A day he would never forget. Jesus was on top of the world, feeling good, full of life, ready to go out and start his ministry.

But oftentimes in life, our highest highs are followed by some of our lowest lows, and that was happened to Jesus. Baptism to wilderness; joy to temptation; just like *that*.

Temptation comes in many forms, but it always pulls us away from God and the life God intends for us. Temptation whispers that it's all about us, about *our* wants, *our* desires, *our* needs, until we're blind to the people around us and deaf to God's voice. Temptation causes us to look inward, pulling our focus away from following God and loving others.

And as you may have noticed, temptation occurs most during times of weakness. Times when we're physically and emotionally vulnerable. After Jesus resisted, it says that the devil left Jesus alone "until an opportune time." (v. 13) Temptation is always looking for opportune times in our lives.

That's probably why my own mentor in ministry is always encouraging me to try to be aware of my weaknesses. To be aware of when I'm hungry, angry, and tired. It's those moments – when life throws us a curveball, when we're worn out, stressed, hurting, or scared – those are the times when we experience temptation the most. It's good to understand your own weaknesses and vulnerabilities, your own habits and tendencies, so that you can be aware of the "opportune times" for temptation in your life.

But this passage isn't just about temptation. It's about how Jesus *responded* to temptation. Did you notice what he did, each time? Each time Jesus was tempted, he responded, he quoted from the Bible. All of his quotes came from the book of Deuteronomy, which talks a lot about the Israelite people wandering around in the desert and facing their own temptations. Jesus knew that the Bible can help us respond to temptation.

The Bible is an old book, but it speaks to the situations we experience today. And that's part of why we study the Bible. So when we're scared or terrified, we can whisper, "the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" and remember that even though we walk through valleys, we don't have to fear, because God is with us. (Psalm 23) So that when we have a crappy day or something horrible happens and we're tempted to think God doesn't love us, we can remember that "God so loved the world that he sent his only Son" (John 3:16) and that no matter what happens, "neither death nor life nor things in the present nor things to come nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God." (Romans 8:38-39) So that when we recognize we have done wrong, instead of being tempted to punish ourselves with guilt and shame, we can believe that if "we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9) So that when we're tempted to join in the bullying, we can remember that God has called us to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:39); and when we're tempted to lash out in revenge, we can recall the words our Lord taught us, saying "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44); and when we're tempted to lust after what isn't ours, we can hear God's command to set our minds on things that are true, honorable, just, and pure (Philippians 4:8); and when we feel alone and lost and we're tempted to despair, we can trust in the promise that Jesus is always with us, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:20)

God gives us tools to help us resist temptation. The Bible. And each other. Part of the beautiful gift of this community of faith you're a part of is that it's full of people who want to accompany you through life. In community we get to share each other's joys and bear each

other's burdens. This church isn't just a social club, there's a *purpose* to our community, and we're here to help each other through life and all the trials and temptations we experience.

In this place, you don't have to hide your temptations and struggles away. The church is not a place for fake perfect people, it's a place where *real people* can support each other as we follow Jesus together. You don't have to hide your temptations and struggles in the dark, where they remain powerful and strong! In this community of faith you can drag them out into the light and share them. That's why we have each other. You don't have to wander around in the wilderness by yourself. You can share the journey. You can share your failures and struggles and temptations with the people in this church. I'm here as your pastor to hear about your temptations and trials and to help you bear them, and I will love you no matter what you tell me. Temptation is easier when you don't face it alone.

And the beautiful truth of our Gospel reading this morning is that we're *never* alone in times of wilderness and temptation. Verse 1 tells us that the Holy Spirit was with Jesus when we wandered into the wilderness. The Holy Spirit was with Jesus when he was tempted. And verse 14 (right after our reading) says that the Holy Spirit was with Jesus *after* the temptations too.

God's Spirit is with you during your times of temptation. When you're tempted, it is *not* a sign that God has abandoned you. It does *not* mean that God doesn't love you. In those times, Jesus is with you. The same Jesus who was tempted in the wilderness is with you during your times of wilderness and temptation. And because he knows that we lack the power on our own to overcome the temptation that we all face in our lives, because he knows that we will

inevitably fail and fall again and again, God promises to be there with you in those times, offering you love and strength and forgiveness and grace.

And that is why Jesus refused to give into the temptation. Because he didn't come to use his power for himself, he came to be your Savior. He refused to let anything distract him from that mission. He refused to take the easy way out. Instead he chose the path of obedience to God's, the same path that led him to the cross, the path that led to our forgiveness and the abundance of God's grace. He refused to turn stone to bread for himself, so that he could satisfy the hunger in our very souls. He refused to wield political power with might and force, so that he could bring about an empire of justice and peace that lasts forever. And he refused to jump off the temple to see if God would catch him, so that he could go willingly to the cross, trusting that God would not let him fall, that God's love and life would triumph over death now, forever, and always. He remained focused on his Father, focused on his mission, focused on *us*. And that love he felt for us – the love he feels for you – was more than enough to overcome any temptation. Thanks be to God. Amen.