

***“Tempted To Be Something Else”***  
**Reverend Bill Gause**  
**Overbrook Presbyterian Church**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent**  
**March 5, 2017**

**First Scripture Reading: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7**

<sup>15</sup>The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it. <sup>16</sup>And the Lord God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; <sup>17</sup>but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.” (*Note: Genesis 2:18-25 omitted for the sake of brevity and story continuity.*)

<sup>3</sup> Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” <sup>2</sup>The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; <sup>3</sup>but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’”<sup>4</sup>But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; <sup>5</sup>for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

<sup>6</sup>So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. <sup>7</sup>Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

**Second Scripture Reading: Matthew 4:1-11**

<sup>1</sup>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.



**Sermon: “Tempted To Be Something Else”**

Today, on this first Sunday of Lent, we are being asked to consider temptation. We seem to think of temptation as anything that challenges our self-control. When you’re trying to manage your cholesterol level, bacon can be a temptation. If you’re trying to be more punctual in the morning, the snooze button can be a temptation. If you’re trying to be more active and exercise more, the TV can be a temptation.

Rita Mae Brown once wrote “Lead me not into temptation, I can find the way myself.” And we laugh because it’s funny. We face temptation with a lot of bravado “If eating a whole sleeve of thin mints in front of the TV is wrong, then I don’t want to be right.” We act like temptation is something cute. And we don’t avoid it so much as embrace it.

Of course, there are other, darker vulnerabilities that aren’t so quaint. For some folks, the inability to resist things like drugs, or alcohol, or gambling is neither cute nor funny.

Either way, we tend to think of temptation as something that tests our resolve and pulls us away from our intended course of action. Your brain may say “Eat sensibly,” but your stomach says “Eat it all!” That’s the way we tend to see temptation.

But Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness is a defining moment for him. The things with which he is tempted are real, and likely were temptations for him his entire life.

Temptation and the struggle to resist it has long been a part of our religious tradition. Our Biblical story actually begins with Adam and Eve confronting temptation and the serpent in that tree in the middle of the Garden.

But what we miss in that story, is that even though the fruit offered to Adam and Eve *looked good*, it was the *wisdom* that came from eating the fruit, that was so enticing. God put these first humans in a perfectly crafted garden, complete with everything they could ever need. They were made for fellowship with God. They were given one simple instruction: Eat everything *except that!*

But the serpent offers wisdom, something most folks would agree is a good thing. Looking at the state of political discourse in the world today, one might be forgiven for thinking a serpent handing out “wisdom fruit” might not actually be such a bad thing. As Fred Craddock has written, “A real temptation is an offer not to fall but to rise. The [serpent] in Eden did not ask, ‘Do you wish to be [like] the devil?’ but [rather] ‘Do you wish to be [like] God?’”<sup>1</sup>

So what’s really being offered here is not fruit or even wisdom, but a chance to exchange the lives for which they had been created – lives defined by fellowship and communion with God – for something that looked a lot better but really wasn’t.

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<sup>1</sup> Craddock, Fred B. *Luke*. Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1990. 56. Print. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching.

That's what sin does: it turns us from the path for which God created us. And temptation, the dangerous kind, entices us not just to *do* something different, but to *be* something different.

In our New Testament lesson this morning, we read the familiar story of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness. In this story, it's easy to focus on the things with which Jesus was being tempted: bread and power and invincibility. But those are all just vehicles through which Satan was challenging whether or not Jesus would remain true to God and to the purpose to which God had called him. Will Jesus obey God's will... or try to bend God's will to his own?

When Satan offers Jesus the chance to turn stones to bread, it is probably not the first time food had crossed Jesus' mind. Forty days is a long time. After a long fast, bread would have looked pretty good! But listen to what Satan says to Jesus: "*If you are the Son of God, then turn these stones to bread.*" Satan is trying to redefine for Jesus what it means to be Son of God. *If you are God's son, then you can do whatever you want.*

Jesus' reply is that we live by more than "bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." That is to say; we live by all of God's word; all of God's purpose and mission for the world, not just the parts that directly benefit us.

Satan points out to Jesus that a part of that "whole word of God" Jesus was just talking about actually says that no harm will come to him, again, *if* he is God's son. But, as Jesus understands, it also says do not test God.<sup>2</sup> When God says "I've got this under control," asking God to then "prove it" is not a sign of faith; it's a sign of doubt.

And then Satan offers Jesus the chance to rule all of the Kingdoms of the world if he will only bow down to worship Satan. Usually folks see the tempting part of this third test to be the chance to rule the world. But that was eventually going to happen for Jesus anyway. In this third test, what Satan is really offering is not *more* power, but *a short cut* to get to that power; a path with no suffering, or struggle; a shortened journey that will not lead to a cross. But Jesus rejects Satan's offer to take the easy way because that is not the path to which he has been called; that is not the purpose for which he has been created.

This story of Jesus being tested in the wilderness is meant to tell us something about Jesus while inviting us to examine ourselves and our own walks of discipleship. We are tempted every day to be something other than what we were created to be. The tests Jesus faced are similar to the ones we face: To be selfish, to abuse power, to put our faith in people and things that are not God. The short-cuts are there and the opportunities are many to be something other than what God made us to be.

So in the face of temptation, the question arises: Will we embrace the lives for which we have been created? Lives lived in relationship with God and one another; lives of compassion and concern for our brothers and sisters; lives that reflect God's law and God's intention for justice

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<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 6:16, NRSV

and fair play; lives that embody God's desire for us to be moral; will we embrace the lives for which we have been created, or not?

Resisting temptation is not just about closing the fridge and turning off the TV. It's not just about holding your tongue or stepping away from the keyboard. Resisting temptation is about standing in the wilderness and facing the truth about who we are and who God has created us to be and deciding if we want to accept that life or trade it for something that seems easier or more attractive.

In this season of Lent, let us take the time to examine ourselves and own the times when we have failed these tests and others. And then let us recommit ourselves to being the people that God has created us to be.

To God be all glory, honor, power and dominion, in this world and in the world that is to come. Amen.