

Pastor's Sermon

March 9, 2025 Lent 1

Each year on the first Sunday in Lent, the Gospel reading tells the story of Jesus' temptation in the desert wilderness. Luke highlights three specific temptations, tests. Each test is strong and each one is based on a truth. Luke, like the other gospel writers was not writing these words to nonbelievers in order to convert them. He is writing these words to faithful believers. He writes them about 50 years after Jesus' resurrection. Luke wasn't there to walk with Jesus. He wasn't even there when Paul and the others began to build a church. His opening words in the Gospel acknowledges that there are many accounts of Jesus' life. He writes his gospel in order to instruct those who love God to know about Jesus. He writes to the Gentile church, to non Jews who have come to believe in Jesus. He writes to encourage believers who are facing persecution by the Roman Empire to remain strong in their faith.

Luke begins his story with the birth of John the Baptist. Then comes the birth of Jesus, the visit of the shepherds, the boy Jesus in the Temple, and his Baptism by John. Then comes the episode which we remember today – the full-grown Jesus being tested in the wilderness. At his Baptism Jesus received God's call to mission: "You are my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Those hearing Luke's words would relate to that call. They knew they were baptized to serve. They were called to witness truth to power, God's love for all people with no boundaries. There were to be no lines drawn between Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, male and female. They were given a call to serve in the world where Caesar proclaimed himself to be the Son God and Lord of the World. A world where anyone dare to say otherwise risked arrest, prison, execution, and a cross. To proclaim Jesus as Lord was considered treason, punishable by death. Such threats caused many believers to question their faith. They faced many tests to challenge their beliefs.

Each one of the three tests Jesus faces in the wilderness are a metaphor that believers faced in the church. #1."Jesus... If you are the Son of God, tell

this stone to become bread." After his baptism Jesus took a long time to reflect on what exactly his call meant for him, forty days of fasting and prayer. This challenge to Jesus was for him to use his power to meet his own needs. There was truth in the tempter's words. "Jesus, if you don't take care of yourself first, you will not be able to take care of anyone else." Jesus replies with Scripture, "There is more to life than bread alone." Bread is used to take care of yourself, what about all of the other hungry people? The early church faced the same test, take care of their own needs first, then help the others with what is leftover. After all, if you don't take care of yourself first, there will be no church to take care of anyone else. Jesus speaks truth to power. He says no to that. For the church love is not secondary; love is primary.

#2 is an equally enticing test for Jesus and the church. "Look at all these kingdoms of the world. "Think of all the power you will have, all of the authority you will wield, all of the splendor you will enjoy. Forget God, take the world for yourself!" The tempter tells Jesus to forget God; real world revolves around a different rules. The real power in the world is not way of God. Truth. The early church was challenged to change their ultimate loyalty, put God in his place. Real power rests in the Empire. They were tempted to put their faith in political power to right all the wrongs that plagued them. There were some occasional evils, but you should ignore them. Put your country before God. That is the way to real power in the world. Again, Jesus speaks truth to power, "Worship and serve God alone." Governments are composed of humans. Humans like power, power corrupts, stick to God first.

#3 challenges Jesus again. "Put God to the test. If there really is a God, and you are really God's son, then throw yourself down from the pinnacle of the Temple and see if God saves you? It's only a 450' drop. If there really is a God to care about you, God will send an army of angels to save you. It would be great TV. You need to attract attention any way you can, the more spectacular the better! People are always attracted to a powerful performance. You'll be a star like no other!" Jesus responds, You don't put God to the test!. He reminds the church that faithfulness is not found in flash and spectacle, but in faithful service to others.

Human history is filled with examples of power, domination, exploitation, and control. This weekend is the 60th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, March 7, 1965 in Selma, AL. I was privileged to remember this last Summer by walking across that bridge. Imagining the chaos and bloodshed of that day was chilling with every step. Otis, Nadine, and Pr Joel also walked across that bridge last year, but on a different tour. They shared that with you in their presentation of the Thriving Together program Our Saviour is involved in.

An estimated 525-600 people gathered that day at the Edmund Pettus Bridge. They were to begin the first of three such walks. Those gathered then were to walk 54 miles from Selma to the state capital in Montgomery. It was to be a nonviolent protest led by church members in protest of the racial injustices of the Jim Crow laws which prevented African Americans from voting.

As the marchers began to peacefully walk, they were met with violence, tear gas and nightsticks wielded by state troopers. The televised images of the brutal attack presented horrifying images of the bloodied and severely injured. Fortunately, there were none killed that day. The churches took an active role on both sides. Some proclaiming to speak for God with Bible truth. They said that racial differences were the result of God punishing certain people for sins that were committed, therefore some races were superior to others, more favored in the eyes of God. Other Christians quoted Saint Paul and Jesus to assert that God's love extends to all races equally, God has no favorites. In our Second Reading Paul speaks about how faith in Christ changed him from pursuing a life of power and hatred for those others. "For God there is no difference among people, God loves everyone all the same."

As the people of God, we are not vaccinated against temptation. The lure of power and control are active in our world. Our faith is regularly tested. We are don't always get it right as individuals, as a Church, and as a nation. As followers of Jesus, we often find ourselves to be "resident aliens" in this world. We seem to be out of synch with the world around us. These temptations are a real and present danger. They call us to be vigilant, to be on guard constantly. This work is hard. History is filled with such struggles. We need to remember that God is with us. God calls us to provide a faithful response,

guided by the Holy Spirit. Together as the people of God, we are guided by the spirit of the risen Christ to share and celebrate our differences. We are called to learn from the experiences of others and speak truth to power. We are called to build a better, safer world for all of God's children. Amen.