

First Reading Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7

^{2:15}The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden;¹⁷but 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.”

^{3:1}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?’”²The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³but 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.’”⁴But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; ⁵for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”⁶So 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. ⁷Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Gospel Matthew 4:1-11

¹Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.²He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.³The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”⁴But he answered, “It is written,

‘One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying 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.’”

⁷Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”¹⁰Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”¹¹Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Jesus and Bread

March 5, 2017

Jesus walked this lonesome valley, He had to walk it by himself; O, nobody else could walk it for Him, He had to walk it by Himself.

Last week Jesus called us to come with him to the mountaintop to pray, to hear God’s voice, to hear once again that He is the beloved Son of God. To be reminded that we too, are beloved daughters and sons, called to follow him up to the mountaintop, as well as into the valleys of life.

Today Jesus is propelled into the desert to do the same. To pray, to fast, to wander with God for 40 days, which could just as well be 40 years, a parallel story to those Israelites who wandered in the wilderness. Or to Moses who stayed with God on another mountaintop for 40 days, to dwell in God’s presence and be changed and

challenged. For Jesus, challenged to consider what it means to be the Beloved. To clarify his identity as the Son of God and his call to ministry. To learn to live faithfully and to depend on God for all things.

It won't be the first or last time that he does this, as you may recall the many times that Jesus was challenged about his Son-ship, to provide some sort of miracle or perform some sign, to prove he was the son of God. There are many places in the gospels where we hear the words, "If you are the son of God, then show us, or do this or that to prove it." Even on the cross he was tempted to do so.

But today, just as he did in his baptism, Jesus walks before us and shows us what it means to be a child of God, and also, to show us that he was tempted and tested just as we all are. That there are voices in the world that call us to abandon our reliance on God. And so, we too, are called to take this journey, this 40 day Lenten journey, to perhaps confront our own demons, our own doubts, our own idols and priorities. To walk in Jesus' sandals a bit as we encounter the demons of our own egos and desires for the next 40 days.

We must walk this lonesome valley, we have to walk it by ourselves; O, nobody else can walk it for us, we have to walk it by ourselves.

When the world says, "Turn these stones into bread, or challenge God to prove himself, or put your trust in all that the world can offer," what does that mean to you?

Will Willimon, in his book *What's Right with the Church* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1985), tells about leading a Sunday School class that was studying the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. After careful study and explanation of each of the three temptations, Dr. Willimon asked, "How are we tempted today?" A young salesman was the first to speak. "Temptation is when your boss calls you in, as mine did yesterday, and says, 'I'm going to give you a real opportunity. I'm going to give you a bigger sales territory. We believe that you are going places, young man.'

"But I don't want a bigger sales territory," the young salesman told his boss. "I'm already away from home four nights a week. It wouldn't be fair to my wife and daughter."

"Look," his boss replied, "we're asking you to do this for your wife and daughter. Don't you want to be a good father? It takes money to support a family these days. Sure, your little girl doesn't take much money now, but think of the future. Think of her future. I'm only asking you to do this for them," the boss said.

The young man told the class, "Now, that's temptation." (William Willimon, adapted by King Duncan)

Jesus overcame his first temptation by putting his complete trust in God. That's a good example for us. and these are some really fundamental questions that we all have to answer for ourselves, and I wonder how you might answer them. When we find ourselves hungry for fulfillment, frustrated with our station in life, tempted by power and opportunity, and tested in life, how do we respond? Do we depend on God or do we turn our stones into bread? Do we put our trust in what we can do on our own, or do we lean wholly on God?

Now if we look at all our scientific accomplishments we can readily admit that we can do some amazing things, can't we? We can turn chemicals into medicine, fuel, plastic. We can turn minerals into steel and iron. We can make food out of everything and sometimes without any dirt at all. We can grow the biggest crops, engineer seeds for both good and bad, land a rover on Mars. We can do almost anything we can imagine, can't we? How do you make rayon? Or an automatic transmission? How does the internet really work? Or a cell phone or a computer? How do you replace a heart or kidney? We can do all those things. And where does God fit into all that?

I wonder if that is what the Tempter is really asking Jesus. “I know you can do this on your own, so who needs God? Cut out the middle man and do it on your own.” Maybe that’s what the Genesis story is about as well. What about you? How many times a day do you turn stones into bread? How many times do you decide you will do it your way and not depend on God? How many ways do we reject our relationship with God so we can do what we want? Feed ourselves with our own food, the food that the world or that voice in your head says you must have or you won’t be complete.

Now I can tell you that I am more like those wandering Israelites than Jesus. I wandered for a long time in the desert seeking food and fulfillment from the stores the world had to offer. I often faced temptation to either trust in God’s will or to do it my own way. I usually chose my own way and suffered the consequences. But over time, and maybe it has been over 40 years, I have come to trust more, to lean more on God, to find my true identity as a child of God. That like Paul said, “It is in him that I live, move, and have my being”, something I think these Lenten journeys are about. That when I hear that voice that tempts me to trust in something other than God, I more readily turn away from it and listen to God’s voice. By Grace, I am a work in progress, not perfect yet, not by a long shot, but perfect in Him, thank goodness.

You must go and stand your trial, you have to stand it by yourself, O, nobody else can stand it for you, you have to stand it by yourself.

In one of my devotions this week by Maryetta Anschutz, she shared this, “Temptation comes to us in moments when we look at others and feel insecure about not having enough. Temptation comes in judgements we make about strangers or friends who make choices we don’t understand. Temptation rules us, making us able to look away from those in need and to live our lives unaffected by poverty, hunger, and disease. Temptation rages in moments when we allow our temper to define our lives or when addiction to wealth, power, influence over others, vanity, or an inordinate need for control defines who we are.”

Jesus’ responses to Satan, remind us that what gives meaning and courage to all our lives, is relationship to God, to Jesus, to the Divine, to each other. We don’t live by bread alone but by the Word, the Word who is God with us. This Word who is bread for the world. And even the bread we share this morning is not just bread to feed the body but bread to feed the soul. Bread as a reminder. A reminder of Jesus who came to set us free, to give us grace and love beyond measure. Who feeds us with heavenly food so that when the world comes to tempt us to bow down and worship all it has to offer, or when we are tempted to ignore the needs of others because we think we are more important, we will think twice, turn to God first, and then look that tempter in the eye and say, “Get Lost! I am a child of God.”

Let us pray. I am going to begin with a prayer written by Saint Bonaventure who was a 13th century mystic. Let us pray,

Pierce My Soul with Your Love

Lord Jesus Christ,
pierce my soul with your love
so that I may always long for you alone,
who are the bread of angels
and the fulfillment of the soul's deepest desires.

May my heart always hunger and feed on you,
so that my soul may be filled with sweetness in your presence.

May my soul thirst for you,
who are the source of life, wisdom, knowledge, light
and all the riches of God our Father.

May I always seek and find you,
think about you, speak to you
and do everything for the honour and glory of your name.

Be always my hope, my peace, my refuge and help
in whom my heart is rooted
so that I may never separate from you. ~ written by Bonaventure, 13th century

Loving God, we thank you that Jesus came and showed us the way. Showed us that temptation is all around us but if we turn our faces and hearts to you, we will find strength to trust that you will provide for us and meet the deep needs of our bodies and souls. Help us we pray, as we often wander in the desert of temptation, and bring us safely to the promised land of love and grace.

Be with those this day who face temptations and challenges that lead them away from your grace and love. encourage we pray, all who are in distress and anguish and all who are caught between difficult choices. Be with those in the deserts of war and desolation, those who are wandering in hopelessness, those who are suffering from illness or depression, those who mourn and grieve, those who are hungry, cold, homeless, and those looking for meaningful work to provide for themselves or their families.

Bread of the World, we bring before you now those who are dear to our hearts here at home, and place them in your tender care with prayers both spoken and silent.

Gracious God, we give you thanks for our lives and offer them now in humble service. Use us and guide us as we bring your love to the world, for we ask all these things in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray saying, Our Father...