

Sermon Sunday, February 14th 2016
First Sunday in Lent

Romans 10: 8b-13

It's the word of faith that welcomes God to go to work and set things right for us. This is the core of our preaching. ⁹Say the welcoming word to God—"Jesus is my Master"—embracing, body and soul, God's work of doing in us what he did in raising Jesus from the dead. That's it. You're not "doing" anything; you're simply calling out to God, trusting him to do it for you. That's salvation. ¹⁰With your whole being you embrace God setting things right, and then you say it, right out loud: "God has set everything right between him and me!"

¹¹Scripture reassures us, "No one who trusts God like this—heart and soul—will ever regret it." ¹²It's exactly the same no matter what a person's religious background may be: the same God for all of us, acting the same incredibly generous way to everyone who calls out for help. ¹³"Everyone who calls, 'Help, God!' gets help."

Luke 4: 1-13

¹Now Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wild. ²For forty wilderness days and nights he was tested by the Devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when the time was up he was hungry.

³The Devil, playing on his hunger, gave the first test: "Since you're God's Son, command this stone to turn into a loaf of bread."

⁴Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy: "It takes more than bread to really live."

⁵For the second test he led him up and spread out all the kingdoms of the earth on display at once. ⁶Then the Devil said, "They're yours in all their splendor to serve your pleasure. I'm in charge of them all and can turn them over to whomever I wish. ⁷Worship me and they're yours, the whole works."

⁸Jesus refused, again backing his refusal with Deuteronomy: "Worship the Lord your God and only the Lord your God. Serve him with absolute single-heartedness."

⁹For the third test the Devil took him to Jerusalem and put him on top of the Temple. He said, "If you are God's Son, jump. ¹⁰It's written, isn't it, that 'he has placed you in the care of angels to protect you; ¹¹they will catch you; you won't so much as stub your toe on a stone?'"

¹²"Yes," said Jesus, "and it's also written, 'Don't you dare tempt the Lord your God.'"

¹³That completed the testing. The Devil retreated temporarily, lying in wait for another opportunity

Many of us know today's reading from Luke chapter 4 when Jesus is tempted in the desert. This story is also in the Gospel of Mark and in the Gospel of Matthew,

where the temptation of Jesus shows up in Matthew chapter 4, but in the gospel of Matthew the last two temptations of Jesus are reversed, but I suppose what is important is that Jesus is actually tempted 3 times after spending 40 days in the desert. If we look at Mark he gives very few details other than the fact that Jesus was tempted. Being that this story shows up in the 3 synoptic gospels I think that there is something very important for us to learn from this story. Now, if we go back to the story, I don't know about you but after 40 days in the wilderness, without a bath or shower, no much if anything to eat, I am not sure if I would be in the mood to be tempted, and yet Jesus finds himself tempted, as David Lose, the president of Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia says, with bread, power and safety. After coming in from those 40 days in the wilderness it would have been really difficult to resist those temptations.

So then one of the questions I have is what if Jesus had not responded to the temptations the way that he did? What would that have meant for Jesus and for us? It would have been very easy to have said yes, and I think back to the number of times that I have had to make a choice that was difficult and how many times I made a decision that was the easy way out. It might have been very easy for Jesus to just say yes to what was being offered to him.

Has anyone seen the movie the "Perfect Score" it starred Chris Evans, you know Captain America, as Kyle a high school student who is ranked in the middle of his senior class, or as the movie pointed out, is rather average. Kyle wanted to get into architecture but his first attempt in writing his SAT was not up to the standards that he needed to get into Cornell which is said to be the best school of architecture in the states.

Then there was Anna who was ranked second in her class and wants to get into Brown and needs almost 1400 on her SAT but she freezes every time she tries to write the test. So Kyle, Anna, Matt, Francesca, Desmond, and Roy decide that they will steal the answers to the SAT and then they can eventually have the life that they really want. So throughout the movie the young people work at planning the break in to get the answer key to the SAT. As we watch them plan the theft we come to see that these young people are actually really good people who just find themselves in a bad situation. So in on a Friday evening these 6 teens break into the offices of the company that administers the SAT. After many of your average movie tensions and some laughs they manage to get that answers to the tests. The next day when they gather to finally rewrite their tests, they all decide that they don't need the answers; they will write the test themselves, what they would give up in making the choice to use the answers was too much. They chose to live into who they really were as opposed to choosing to compromise who they really were. In the end they have all been changed by the experience.

The gospel story from Luke occurs right after the Jesus' baptism where the Holy Spirit comes and rests on Jesus. His identity as beloved of God has been stated and immediately after Jesus is driven into the desert for testing. In this testing I wonder if what was really at stake was Jesus identity as the Son of God. What if Jesus had done what the tempter had asked of Jesus, would that have compromised his identity. Then we might understand that this tempting of Jesus in the wilderness has a deeper meaning than just being tempted with bread, power and safety. This tempting becomes about Jesus self-identity.

If Jesus would have done what was asked, or take what was offered, he would have not been trusting in God and therefore would have been going against part

of his identity as that beloved one of God. Much as those students recognized who they really were in the movie and chose to live into their true selves. Jesus in refusing the temptations lives fully into who he truly was. In reality these temptations become more about the challenging the identity of Jesus than actually a straight temptation into something else.

This brings us to the idea as to what do we mean when we talk about temptation? It has been said that when we are tempted we are not tempted towards something, but rather we are tempted away from something. In the movie “The Perfect Score” the young people who were tempted to steal the SAT test scores were being tempted away from being who they really were. In the wilderness, Jesus was tempted to give up his identity as God given in order to either satisfy his needs or ensure his own personal power and safety. And so when we are tempted we are not really tempted towards something we are rather tempted away from something. What would that “thing” be? When we are tempted we are actually tempted away from God, and from God wanting and desiring to be in relationship with us as creations of God. So our tempting is not towards those things that are offered, but rather we are tempted away from relationship with God.

This Lent we are focusing on those things that led to spiritual hungering. Today’s readings help us to understand that which can lead to spiritual hungering and that are those things in this world that tempt us to turn away from God.

Those things that help to block us from seeing God and continuing to turn towards God. Jesus was presented with something that I am sure he needed, food, and power and safety for the rest of his life, and given his life as a poor, yet

Jesus denied those things for his understanding of his identity in God. We are challenged every day to look at those things that are keeping us from fully living into our identity as beloved by God and lead us to that hungering for God in our lives.

Yet even in our hungering for God in our lives, even in our turning away from God we know that God is always coming towards us. Yet, how do we really know this? Our symbol that was presented this morning was the Bible. Our gathering song was tell me the stories of Jesus. In this book we are given those stories that affirm that we are beloved of God. We are given the stories that represent God's love for us. We are given the stories of Jesus, God incarnate that symbolized a new way of relationship with God.

And so with the help of our sacred scriptures, those stories that affirm that we are beloved of God, we work to resist temptation, those things that cause us to turn away from God, those things that take us away from our true identity as beloved of God, and those things that can lead to spiritual hungering that the trappings of this world cannot fulfill. It is a choice; it is our choice to live into our identity as beloved of God. Will we allow ourselves to be turned away from God, or will we continue to turn towards God in relationship. Will we try to satisfy our spiritual hungering with the temptations of this world, or will we focus on a faith that brings us into closer relationship with God. This is not an easy choice in the world today, we are told that many things will fulfill all of our needs and desires, but in truth is it God that we truly hunger for? Our hunger can be satisfied by turning towards God if only we will chose.