

Temptation

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

¹⁵The 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.”

¹Now 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.

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.

Romans 5:12-19

¹²Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned—¹³sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. ¹⁴Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.

¹⁵But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. ¹⁶And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. ¹⁷If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

¹⁸Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. ¹⁹For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible

Today's sermon is about temptation. First, a couple of stories about temptation.

There was an old man and a young man that worked together in an office. The old man always had a jar of peanuts on his desk, and the young man really loved peanuts. One day, while the old man was away from his desk, the young man yielded to temptation and helped himself to a handful. When the old man returned, the young man felt guilty and confessed to his crime.

"Don't worry, son. I never eat the peanuts anyway," the old man replied. "Since I lost my teeth, all I can do is suck the chocolate off the M&M's."

A dying man gathered his best friends - a lawyer, doctor and a pastor - at his bedside and handed each of them an envelope containing \$25,000 in cash. He made them each promise that after he died - during his funeral they would place the three envelopes in his coffin. He told them that he wanted to have enough money to enjoy the next life.

A week later the man died. At the funeral, the lawyer and doctor and the pastor each concealed an envelope in the coffin and bid their old client and friend farewell.

By chance, the three met several months later. Soon the pastor, feeling guilty, blurted out a confession - saying that there was only \$10,000 in the envelope he placed in the coffin. He felt, rather than waste all the money, that he would send it to a missionary in South America. He asked for their forgiveness.

The doctor, moved by the pastor's sincerity, confessed that he too had kept some of the money for a worthy medical charity. The envelope, he admitted, had only \$8000 in it. He said that he too could not bring himself to waste the money so frivolously when it could be used to benefit others.

By this time the Lawyer was seething with self-righteous outrage. He expressed his deep disappointment in the felonious behavior of two of his oldest and most trusted friends. "I am the only one who kept my promise to our dying friend. I want you both to know that the envelope I placed in the coffin contained the full amount.

The other men looked down in embarrassment and the lawyer continued, "Indeed, only I honored the deathbed wishes of our great friend. My envelope contained my personal check for the entire \$25,000."

I may be taking my life in my hands by preaching a sermon on today's passage from Genesis. Few passages in the Bible will stir up more arguments than the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

First, people want to argue about whether the story is literally true or not. Was this a real story - were Adam and Eve real people who actually lived in the Garden of Eden? If so, where was the Garden of Eden? Is it still there? Or is it a made-up story? - a metaphor for the human condition? - an attempt to explain why people are imperfect?

I'm not going to tackle that subject today - that is a subject for some other sermon some other time.

The second argument about the story of Adam and Eve is who is at fault. Is it

Adam's fault that they ate the apple? Or is it Eve's fault? Or are they both at fault? This argument seems to fall out along gender lines. If you are female, then you probably think it was Adam's fault. If you are a man - well you probably think otherwise. When Carol found out that I was preaching on this passage, she told me "Make sure you tell them that it was Adam's fault." People will dissect this passage word by word, phrase by phrase, looking for some word or phrase that supports their view.

What do I think? Well I think that there is enough blame to go around. To me the point of the scripture is not who is at fault, who did or did not say what. The point is that both Adam and Eve were tempted by evil, both of them had the opportunity to *not* eat the apple, but both of them succumbed to the temptation and ate the apple. And that is when the trouble started for us all.

Whether the story of Adam and Eve is real, or whether it is a metaphor, the moral of the story is that people know good from bad - right from wrong. And people have a choice. They can choose what is right, what God wants, or they can choose what is wrong, what God doesn't want. People can succumb to temptation or they **can resist it. God said to Adam '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.'**" Adam and Eve ate the apple, and now we all die.

Thing turned out a lot better when Jesus was tempted. As we heard in the passage from Matthew, Jesus was tempted three times by the devil.

First, Jesus was tempted to turn stones into bread to ease the hunger. Jesus had been in the wilderness for forty days and had been fasting the whole time. Now in those days, 40 meant - *a whole bunch*. So Jesus may not have actually fasted for 40 days. It may have been a couple of weeks. Or it may have been 40 days just like Matthew says.

In any event, Jesus would have been hungry. And Satan tempted the hungry Jesus. Use your power. Turn those rocks into bread, and eat. After all, Jesus you are the Son of God. It wouldn't be hard to do. Later on, Jesus turns the bread and fish

into enough to feed the multitude, so we know he can. Why not do it now? Of course, Jesus refused, saying “It is written, One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Second, Jesus was taken to the pinnacle of the temple. If he jumped off, the angels would catch him. He wouldn't die. And of course, everyone that saw the miracle would know that Jesus was the Messiah. He wouldn't lack for attention or followers. And everyone would pay attention to what he said. That would sure make Jesus's ministry easier. Why not take the easy way out, save some time, save some effort? But Jesus declined, saying “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Lastly, Jesus was taken to the top of a mountain. Satan showed him all the kingdoms of the world and offered to make him ruler of them all. Jesus's disciples have already referred to Jesus as “King of Israel” Why not just accept? Wouldn't it be easier to change the world for the better if you were the ruler? Jesus would have all the power and resources of the Caesar in Rome, and more. And we know how much power the Caesar had. But Jesus turned this offer down, saying “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”

So in one Bible passage we read that Adam and Eve succumbed to temptation, and in another passage that Jesus resisted temptation. Jesus succeeds where Adam and Eve fail. Is that because Jesus is perfect? No, Jesus faced the same temptations we do, and he could have given in.

The author of Hebrews says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). If Jesus couldn't fail, then his temptations would have been less than the temptations we all face everyday. A savior who can't endure the temptations we face all the time can't save us.

What lessons should we take from these passages?

For the answer, we turn to the third scripture reading for this morning, from the Book of Romans. In the 5th chapter, the Apostle Paul - Saint Paul - answers that question. Paul Says: ¹⁸Therefore just as one man's (Adam's) trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's (Jesus's) act of righteousness leads to

justification and life for all. ¹⁹For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

In other words, Jesus came to set right what Adam and Eve had messed up. Because Jesus set things right, you and I no longer have to fear death. And that is the good news. Amen

Invitation to the Observance of Lenten Discipline

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

The early Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church that before the Easter celebration there should be a forty-day season of spiritual preparation.

During this season converts to the faith were prepared for Holy Baptism. It was also a time when persons who had committed serious sins and had separated themselves from the community of faith were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness, and restored to participation in the life of the Church.

In this way the whole congregation was reminded of the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the need we all have to renew our faith. I invite you, there fore, in the name of the Church,

to observe a holy Lent;

by self-examination and repentance;

by prayer, fasting, and self-denial;

and by reading and meditating on God's Holy Word.