

Looking to Lent: Facing Temptation

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael –March 9 2025

1st Sunday in Lent

Readings: Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Romans 10:8b-13; Luke 4:1-13 NRSVUE

Reflection: James 1:12-15

Greeting: I say to the Lord, “You are my refuge, my stronghold! You are my God—the one I trust!” God says, “Because you are devoted to me, I’ll rescue you. I’ll protect you because you know my name. Whenever you cry out to me, I’ll answer.” Says the Lord. “I’ll be with you in troubling times.” God will save you and glorify you and will show you his salvation. (Psalm 91)

Prayer: Everlasting God, we thank you for the tender mercy you show to all people. We are thankful that you sent your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to be of our flesh, and to suffer death on a cross, that all could see and follow the example of his great humility. Help us to overcome the many difficulties that we face in this life. May you always strengthen us by your Holy Spirit that we may face any temptation because you are with us. Mercifully grant that we can follow the example of patience and love shown to us in Jesus. May we embrace his resurrection that we may know life and have it abundantly. Heavenly Father, watch over us in worship this day. Guide us in singing and prayer by your Spirit. And help us to gather in the peace and the love of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: James 1:12-15

¹²Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. ¹³No one, when tempted, should say, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴But one is tempted by one’s own desire, being lured and enticed by it; ¹⁵then, when desire has conceived, it engenders sin, and sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death. (James 1:12-15 NRSVUE)*

We read the words of James, and we hear of resisting temptation. That we should remember that God does not tempt us, but it is our own desire and our own yearnings that draw us away from God. That we strengthen ourselves by faith to avoid temptations. What are some ways that you have faced temptation in your life? How do you overcome those temptations? How can we help each other to overcome the temptations that we face in life? How will you continue to face your problems this Lent? How can we work together to face them in Christ?

Prayer: Merciful God, we seek your presence with us in this place. We know you are with us in the good and the bad and the unknown. Help us through the easy and the difficult, for we know that your Holy Spirit is our guide and teacher in all circumstances. Today we ask you to help us to face temptation, just as Christ faced it in the wilderness. May these forty days be a time of reflection so that we may mend our ways and turn our faces to you, O God. We lift up our prayers to you on this day, knowing that you are always more ready to listen than we are to speak. We lift up the prayers that we voice together and the prayers we keep deep within our hearts. May you guide us, lead us, and strengthen us so that we can face whatever tomorrow

may bring. May we remember you in our mourning and our dancing. May we find you in our weeping and our laughter. And may we always remember that whatever we face, we always face it together with your steadfast love and faithfulness. Bless us and keep us that we may walk in the ways of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition Bible. Our first reading is from Deuteronomy chapter 26, verse 1 through 11.

26 *“When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess and you possess it and settle in it, ² you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. ³ You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, ‘Today I declare to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us.’ ⁴ When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God, ⁵ you shall make this response before the Lord your God: ‘A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. ⁶ When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, ⁷ we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. ⁸ The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; ⁹ and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰ So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me.’ You shall set it down before the Lord your God and bow down before the Lord your God. ¹¹ Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house. (Deuteronomy 26:1-11 NRSVUE*)*

Our next reading is from Romans chapter 10, verse 8b through verse 13.

8b *“The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim), ⁹ because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For one believes with the heart, leading to righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, leading to salvation. ¹¹ The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. ¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Romans 10:8b-13 NRSVUE*)*

Our final reading is from Luke chapter 4, verse 1 through 13.

4 *Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ² where for forty days he was tested by the devil. He ate nothing at all during*

those days, and when they were over he was famished. ³ The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." ⁴ Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.' " ⁵ Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ And the devil said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸ Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.' " ⁹ Then the devil led him to Jerusalem and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰ for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' ¹¹ and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.' " ¹² Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' " ¹³ When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time. (Luke 4:1-13 NRSVUE)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This marks the first Sunday in Lent, and our second message in this Lenten series. This week we talk about temptation. We get one of the best-known examples of temptation this week in the temptation of Christ in the wilderness. It is this temptation that helps us to understand the forty days of Lent. But we also get a couple of other examples of how we avoid temptation in our other readings. I wanted to touch on this briefly before we jump into Jesus' exchange there in the wilderness, because they both give us some background that helps us to think about how we overcome temptation. Now, when I talk about temptation, I mean the whole range. Anything that we are tempted to do that tempts us away from doing the right thing. The things that tempt us away from taking a stand to be comfortable. The things that tempt us away from caring for others to cutting ourselves off.

One of the warnings we get is from Deuteronomy. At first you may not see the temptation there. But part of it is the way that we are told to avoid forgetting where we came from. The temptation to forget. It's because the Israelites are supposed to remember where they came from. If you've started in our congregation wide reading plan of Exodus, you've started to hear about Israel's time in Egypt. A people oppressed. When they enter the land that has been promised, they aren't supposed to give into temptation and forget where they came from. They aren't supposed to forget that they were in Egypt, and that they were treated harshly as slaves. And that when they cried to God, God brought them out of Egypt. They are supposed to bring the first fruits so that they are not tempted to forget what happened to them. Because if they forget where they came from, they will forget to have mercy on people who share their struggle. Because it is tempting to think that we don't need to help anyone else. We got the help we need, so we can pull up the ladder behind us and be done with it. Whereas Deuteronomy says, they should never forget. Remember who you are and remember where you came from. Remember the difficulties you faced and remember the people who are facing them now. Bring the first harvest that you have and give it so that you remember you were once a slave in the land of Egypt. You were an immigrant in a strange land. Do not forget that God saw fit to bring you out, and that God will see fit to bring others out.

Now in Romans we have a bit of a different temptation here, and that's the temptation to think others are not saved. I mention that because one of the things that we are told is that there is no distinction between Jew and Greek. That there is one God for everyone, and

everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. I mention this because it's tempting to think that there are some people who aren't going to be chosen. Some who aren't going to be saved. Some who aren't good enough. When in truth it is that anyone who calls on the name of the Lord is good enough for God. It's tempting to think that we are the only ones chosen. That we are the ones who can keep God locked up in the box we put him in. But that's not our role.

And now we come to the main event, the big temptation. Jesus being tempted. For forty days he's in the wilderness being tested. The archetype for Lent. While Jesus is there, we get three major temptations. And Jesus responds to each one with scripture. Because Jesus is showing us that when we face temptation, if we root ourselves in faith, then we have the foundation we need to resist temptation. Here, the path that's being offered is the easy one. The path to give up doing what is right to do what is easy. To give up following God to do what is expedient. The temptation to take the easy way out, even if it's the wrong way. All of the replies that Jesus gives in this temptation are from scripture. We see a strong foundation in faith strengthening us to overcome temptation. Especially when we are tempted to go astray and do the easy thing. To do not what is right, but what will make things easiest for us. That's what begins to happen here. Because Jesus has been fasting in the wilderness and he is offered the first temptation. "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus' reply is that, "One does not live by bread alone." This is a quote from Deuteronomy 8:3. "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." This is one of those instances where scripture is being directly quoted as a way to overcome temptation. We have the reminder that bread is just one part of what man needs. The temptation is for a miracle to overcome just one part of what he needs. But he is reminded he doesn't need to take the easy way out. This does not require a miracle.

The devil then shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, saying that he will give him authority just as it had been given to him. He tells Jesus, "Worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus gives his reply in the same way that he did before. "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him." Again, quoting scripture. We see the same thing in Deuteronomy 6:13. "The Lord your God you shall fear, him you shall serve, and by his name alone you shall swear." Jesus once again overcomes this temptation with a foundation in faith, knowing the scripture. But that brings us to this last temptation, and boy this one's a doozy. He takes Jesus to Jerusalem, places him on the pinnacle of the temple and says, that if he is the Son of God that he should throw himself from the temple. Why? Because it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" I consider this the most difficult of the temptations, because it is not just what is being offered here. The devil is quoting scripture here. This is Psalm 91:11-12. "For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone." This is a direct quote being given by the devil. Jesus' reply is a different bit of scripture. "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." He comes back with Deuteronomy 6:16, and this matters because this last temptation is twofold for us. Because it's the temptation to give into what is easy, but it is also the temptation to use scripture incorrectly. I'm reminded of this particular section, because of a calendar I once saw, that did not do due diligence with making sure that their quotes were accurate and appropriate. And the problem was that it quoted a verse out of context. It is the temptation not to understand the verses we quote that this calendar company

fell into. It was one of those verse-a-day calendars, and it said, "If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." So inspirational! So blessed! Until you realize that that line is the devil's. They didn't stop to think about who was saying it or why, they quoted it thinking it sounded nice. Now the reason I bring this up is we are often tempted to quote scripture as a weapon. That we find exactly the quote we want, and we throw it out there, and that's that. The problem is, it's often not that simple. Because often there are layers of depth to the verses we are reading. Without context, we could be quoting something terrible, a rhetorical question, or even someone framing the argument of their enemies. Without context, we can miss what is actually happening in our selected verses.

I say this because it is very tempting for us to find the scriptures that we like and to wield them like a sword, cutting anyone down that stands in our way. We overcome that temptation with the knowledge that scripture is complex and multi-layered. Because scripture can both be used for good and bad. And just like we see in the temptation in the wilderness, the devil uses scripture without a problem. This is where discernment comes into play. Because we have to know what scripture is saying so that we may quote it accurately. We have to understand the limitations of scripture so that we may understand that there's not always a clear-cut path. And we have to understand that when we weaponize scripture to beat others over the head with, the first person that we hit is ourselves. Because we are called to use our knowledge for good. That we are to gain wisdom and to help one another in love. That we overcome divisions through Christ. That we are called to remember our own struggles so that we can help others who are in the same boat, on that same journey. The temptation is to forget all of those things. The temptation is to think that we are the arbiters of what is right and what is wrong and to put ourselves in God's place.

Because in the end, that's what those temptations are. Don't know where food is going to come from? Demand a miracle so that you have bread. Don't have trust, instead have demands. You want power? Give in to somebody more powerful than you and they'll give you power over others. Join the oppressor so that you're better off than the oppressed. The real answer is that we do what we can to do what is right and what is good because we follow God. Do we try to force God's hand or do we pray that God's will be done? The temptation is to tell God what he can and cannot do, to tell Christ who is and is not saved. The response is that we don't get to push God around. We respond to the love of Christ in the way that we live our lives. That we respond humbly with kindness and compassion. We resist temptation by remembering what got us here. By remembering the love of Christ that is there for everyone. And so, I pray that as we continue to work through these struggles, as we go through this Lenten reflection, we may allow ourselves to be refined so that our love may be polished and our compassion may be nurtured. That as we reflect on how we live, that we reflect on how we may grow in Christ to continue to be able to do more, to do better. That we are never alone, for we are strengthened in Christ to do all things. And that when we face our temptations, we face them knowing Christ is with us. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and

lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Looking to Lent

This series is a 5-week series plus Ash Wednesday and in it we will be discussing the various issues we face in life. Lent is a time of reflection and letting go, and as such we will be reflecting on the mindsets we can leave behind this year. We will discuss what we give up and what we take up when we face doubts, temptation, adversity, presumptions, indignation, and expectations during Lent. As we look to lent, we are reminded that we face everything with Christ.

3/5: Facing Doubt

3/9: Facing Temptation

3/16: Facing Adversity

3/23: Facing Presumptions

3/30: Facing Indignation

4/6: Facing Expectations

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Toledo UMC

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Worship 8:15am

Etna UMC

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Worship 9:30am

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