

**1 Lent Year A**

**3/1/2020**

**Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11**

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Last Sunday was the last Sunday before Lent and it is always the story of the transfiguration of Jesus.

With themes of power and transformation...

As the veil was removed from Jesus and his face shone like the sun...

By Wednesday we had entered Lent with Ashes on our foreheads...

Choosing which Lenten disciplines to practice...

self-denial through fasting and prayer.

Promises to give up certain things for Lent...

And promises to take on more forms of piety over the next 40 days.

And today marks the first Sunday in Lent.

Which always includes the reading of Jesus temptation in the wilderness.

No matter if we are in year A, B, or C in our Lectionary...

We start Lent off with a good reading of Jesus temptation by the devil.

We are in Year A this year and so our narrative comes from the Gospel of Matthew.

And barely just 4 days in the season of Lent we get the theme of temptation.

Why?

Because God in all his wisdom and understanding knows that we are already being tempted to give up on the practice of not eating chocolate or drinking beer.

Right.

Well... it's more than that.

Lent is a season of repentance...

And we have all fallen for the temptations of this world...

The temptations that come from our heart...

from our own desires.

As James... the brother of Jesus wrote in his letter (James 1:14-15):

*But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*

We have all sinned...

Romans 3:23 – *All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*

And if we have all sinned...

Then we all know what temptation is.

Well, today we get two temptation stories.

The first is from Genesis...

The fall of mankind... the first sin.

Adam and Eve were tempted...

And fell to their desires of lust and pride...

They believed in themselves...

They believed that they knew better than God...

They did not believe the truth of God's Word...

God told them – *You may freely eat of every tree of the garden;  
but 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.*

They could eat from any tree... except one.

So, what did they do?

They ate from that one.

They believed they were wiser than God...

It's called pride.

It's probably the main problem in the human soul.

And in regard to what it means to be human not much has changed.

And so...

The human race needed a savior...

To redeem the world from sin that came on that fateful day in Genesis.

And God... because of his great love for his creation...

sent his Son to make amends... to bring justice...

God incarnate came so that we might have life again... not death.

And that person was Jesus Christ.

And Jesus was tempted... just as we are.

And that brings us to the story in our Gospel reading from Matthew.

Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness where he was tempted by the devil.

He was fasting and the tempter came...

First, tempting Jesus with provision... "*make these stones bread*"

Second, tempting Jesus with testing God.

Third, tempting Jesus with power.

And Jesus... all three times...

defeated the temptation with God's Word.

It's these stories that greet us on this first Sunday in Lent.

And it's here that we should be reminded of why we have entered into this season...

Our liturgy for Ash Wednesday called us into a Holy Lent...

With these words:

*I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word.*

(BCP, 265)

Three clauses.

Repentance...

Prayer and discipline...

And

Reading and meditating on God's holy Word.

The Bible gets its own clause.

If we think Lent is only about giving up chocolate and asking for forgiveness we miss out on a huge part of God's blessing of Lent.

Reading and meditating on Holy Scripture is a huge part of the season.

Reading the Holy Scriptures gives us life.

Reading the Holy Scriptures brings conviction.

Reading the Bible actually puts us in a better posture for repentance and prayer.

They all work together.

Which is why we need self-examination, prayer, and the Word of God.

The writer of Hebrews said:

*Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

(Hebrews 4:12)

Our catechism asks this question (BCP, 853):

*Q: Why do we call the Holy Scriptures the Word of God?*

*A: We call them the Word of God because God inspired their human authors and because God still speaks to us through the Bible.*

The Bible is more powerful than any book ever assembled...

Because it contains the revelation of God.

When we truly encounter the Holy Scriptures...

and allow the illumination of the words of God through the Holy Spirit,  
who guides the Church in the true interpretation of the Scriptures

(BCP, 854)

we receive a gift of God...

A gift of God's grace...

We receive guidance and transformation...

We receive nourishment...

Listen to the words of Jesus from our Gospel...

Jesus said:

*It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'*

Reading God's holy Word gives power...

Look at what Jesus did to resist the devil's temptation in the wilderness.

He didn't call upon the angel armies of the host of heaven...

He didn't wave his hand and make the devil disappear...

He overcame the tempter with the truth of Holy Scripture...

Three times he quoted the Bible:

All from Deuteronomy...

From the Old Testament.

This is why all 66 books of the Bible are the Word of God.

We don't separate the parts by most important or as most inspired.

The Old Testament is just as much the Word of God as the New Testament.

To say otherwise is to flirt with Marcionism which was deemed heresy way back in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

Marcion rejected the Old Testament as inferior to the New Testament.

The Old Testament was the Bible Jesus used.

And the words of St. Paul are just as much the Word of God as the Gospels or the Old Testament...

For us to force some kind of conflict between Paul's theology and Jesus is arrogance.

We certainly don't have a better interpretation of Jesus than St. Paul.

We are two thousand years removed...

St. Paul was just a decade removed from the life of Jesus.

In our Anglican tradition...

In our Episcopalian Catechism...

The Holy Scriptures include all the books of the Old and New Testaments...

and the catechism says they are inspired by the Holy Spirit.

That is the teaching of the Church.

So today... receive the grace of God's Word.

Hear them.

Read them.

Mark them.

Learn them.

Meditate on them.

Memorize them.

Inwardly digest them... as the collect says...

(Proper 28, BCP, 184 & 236)



Get the words of God in your soul.

We need the power of His Word in our lives.

Experience the power of God's Word.

Think about what Jesus said about his own words in Matthew 24.

Jesus said:

*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.*

(Matthew 24:35).

That alone should draw us to the words of Holy Scripture...

As we move through this season of Lent...

May we not fail to read the Holy Scriptures...

Daily... as if our life depended on it.

And may we experience his grace in the Words of God...

The Holy Scriptures...

The Bible.

Amen.