

Sermon at the Cathedral Eucharist

First Sunday of Lent

readings: [Genesis 2.15-17; 3.1-7](#), [Romans 5.12-19](#), [Matthew 4.1-11](#)

26 February 2023

Christ's Temptation

We're exactly 5 days into Lent. I wonder if you have already started to think of chocolate cake as the devil incarnate?

Have you ever considered whether you should resist your temptations in Lent, and if so why?

That's what I would like to explore with you today: What is the use of temptation?

We have just heard of Jesus' temptation in the desert, he was led there by the Spirit and fasted for 40 days before the Devil came and tempted him. It's a familiar story in our Christian tradition but I think we tend to make Jesus' temptation into something that it is not.

We are very often determined to use it as if the temptation in the wilderness was to show that Jesus is better, stronger, faster than the devil himself. As if the temptation was Jesus' personal test to exhibit to God that he is up to the challenge...

And then we use it on ourselves, as if during Lent God is challenging us to be stronger, be more relevant, be more powerful.... Why would he challenge us to any of that? So we can prove our love to him? Or so we can earn his love and acceptance?

But can we do anything to make God love us more?

In case you are unsure of the answer it is an emphatic NO! God loves us unconditionally (all the way to the cross in case anyone has any doubts about his commitment in his love for us).

Lent seems to be full of temptations that have very little to do with Jesus' forty days in the wilderness:

- The temptation to better ourselves. But that is not what Jesus was after in the desert – he wanted proximity to God.
- The temptation to insist that Lent is all about us. But Jesus' life and love was all about God.
- The temptation to believe that our individual walk matters more than how we can walk with others. A very dangerous temptation that leads to "us and them" mentality... that leads to war.

Let us not therefore see Jesus' temptation as justification for testing whether we can resist temptations or not. Instead, let's see it as a glimpse of what lies ahead.

His temptation shows us that life will be full of circumstances that try to make us doubt God's love for us. And the temptation to doubt God's love for us is ever present, isn't it?

This still doesn't answer the question of what temptations are for. So let me try and give you one possible perspective.

What if, temptations are not there to be resisted, but are there to be examined?

What I mean is, that if we are tempted not to believe God's steadfast love... we may also be tempted to not question:

- Our right to satisfy our own hungers when millions go hungry. So whenever you get hungry in Lent and are tempted to break whatever fasting rule you have put in place, first think about those who today will not have the chance to break their fast, and ask why that is the case. What systemic injustice has led us here? How can you speak into that?

If we are tempted not to believe God's steadfast love... We might not question:

- Our need for power over solidarity with those who are oppressed by war or poverty or debt or natural disasters not of their own making... Whose misplaced need for power and more, always more, has brought us to this? That's where repentance comes in...

If we are tempted not to believe God's steadfast love... We might not question:

- Why our disobedience to God in the things above may be detrimental to the world and the people we share it with, and so go on keeping our distance from others, and from God himself (which is the basic definition of hell, isn't it?)

When we examine our temptations, we can catch a glimpse of God working in the midst of our broken world. When he was tempted Jesus turned to God, each and every time. Maybe being aware of obstacles that get in the way of us getting closer to God – our temptations – is how we can do that too.

And we need to glimpse God frequently because we know this is no ordinary Lent. War arrived in the Ukraine a year ago and it is still knocking on our door. As a result, I honestly believe that this Lent needs to be about not what you will give up, but what you will live for!

Not how you might demonstrate your piety, but how you might live in solidarity with others.

Maybe this Lent God is asking us to regain our collective prophetic voices and speak out against oppression.

But gaining that voice comes only from being intimately, intimately connected with God and with God's word. That is the opportunity Lent offers us, to make time to be with God. Because the alternative, looks like war.

This Lent I pray that you, beloved child of God, will discover your true worth in God's eyes. Because when that amount of love pours into us, it can't help but pour out and heal the world.

Amen

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