

Welcome to Lent. I hope you enjoy your stay. I don't know how you feel about Lent, but it's usually not something I get all that excited about. 40 days to think about your sin, to repent and fast just doesn't sound like a good time to me. And every year on this first Sunday we hear of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. How many sermons have you heard on this story that say something to the effect of: Jesus resisted temptation, and so can you! If you only you memorize a few passages of scripture, then you can be just like Jesus. That's the Lent vibe I just can't handle, and you hear it in both religious and secular spaces.

This week I was listening to a podcast with a TV writer who I really admire, but I turned it off when he said that if all of us just try to be just 4% better today than were yesterday, think of how the world could change! 4% seems so achievable! To me it's the same message as traditional Lent: just do a little more. Sacrifice this, learn to meditate, read the Bible more, pray more, go to cross fit, take a 30-day cleanse, read this book, give some money, avoid sugar, eat healthier, exercise more, listen to Christian music, volunteer, etc. Now, I'm all for healthy practices in our lives, but when we turn Lent into a self-improvement plan or an exercise in self-flagellation, I just can't do it.

Next month I'll turn 43, and while I'm not the same person I was 20 years ago, if I'm honest, I'm not sure I'm all that better at resisting temptation than I was 20 years ago. Are you? Maybe you are, and if so, I applaud you, but for me, I still fall short. Trying 4% more sounds like a reasonable plan, but even if we reduce it to 1%, eventually the treadmill is running so fast that I'm going to fall off. What about the church as a whole? It's been 2000 years since Jesus was in the desert with the devil. We've had some time to learn and grow. We've had ample opportunity to get just 4% better a year for 2000 years. So, have we? I don't know. I don't know if we're any better, and I don't know if I'm any better. I suspect I'm better in some ways and worse in others. It's not as simple as getting better or worse.

But let's put ourselves aside for a moment and consider what Jesus does, shall we? The verses just before this passage are Jesus' genealogy and his baptism. You'll recall at Jesus' baptism that the heavens open and God declares Jesus the divine Son in whom God is well pleased. Then Luke goes immediately into a genealogy that starts with Jesus who is the son of Joseph on down the line through David and Abraham and finishes with Adam, who Luke also calls the son of God. Jesus is named the son of God in his baptism, and then Adam is named the son of God in the genealogy. Luke is thus connecting Jesus to all humanity, suggesting that what happens to him has implications for everyone.

It's then that our passage begins when Luke says, "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil." Now, we could do a class on what the Bible means by devil, and I assure you it's not an imp in a red suit carrying a pitchfork. But for the sake of time, I'll just say devil is the Biblical word for the accuser, and all of us have an accuser. Have you ever heard a voice in your head saying, "Who do you think you are? You think you're something special?" Anyone here every suffer from impostor syndrome? How about this one, "You're such an idiot. You call yourself a Christian?" Does that sound familiar? That's the voice of the accuser, and we've all heard it. Jesus while full of the Spirit hears that voice too: "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." The temptation is to doubt that Jesus is who God says he is and to doubt the Spirit who led him to the wilderness can be trusted to lead see him through. You don't need to live by faith, Jesus. Just take what's yours.

This temptation centering around food isn't a coincidence. The genealogy just began with Jesus and ended in Adam, and Adam you may recall was tempted to eat something a long time ago in a garden far, far away. Jesus meanwhile is tempted in the wilderness, which is a reflection of what the garden has become. The world is not how God created it to be. And in both cases with Adam and Jesus, it's not about the food. Eating is both necessary and good. The question in both cases is about trust. Will you trust there is enough, that you are enough, or will you grasp prematurely what God promises to give you in due time? The serpent promised that humanity would be like God if only they took what they wanted right now, instead of trusting God will give them what they need in time. The Holy Spirit had led Jesus to the wilderness, so the question is, will Jesus trust the Spirit or take matters into his own hands? Jesus trusts where Adam does not, and in doing so, Jesus begins to take away the sin of the world. In the end, that's what sin is about. It's not so much about pride, and it's certainly not about following arbitrary rules. It's all about trust. Trust is all it takes, and trust is enough.

The second and third temptations are variations of the first. The second is about seizing power prematurely, while the third is about proving his identity. In the second temptation, the devil offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the world for just a small price. Of course, in due time, Jesus will be exalted as the world's true king through his death and resurrection. But the devil tempts him to seize power now and take the easier path, rather than trusting in God's good time. Jesus knows the path to glory involves suffering, and that's OK. I don't think that any of us grow without suffering. Richard Rohr says the two great teachers in our lives are great love and great suffering, and we need both. Once again, the temptation to power is not so much about pride as it is about trust. Will you trust that despite evidence to the contrary, despite what anyone else has told you, you are God's beloved child? Because if you can trust that, then you don't need to take the easy road to power, and you take the path of suffering in quiet confidence that there is enough. You are enough. Your cup is already full to the brim, and in time, God will exalt you, just as God exalted Jesus. The only people who can be trusted with power are those who don't need it because they know who they are.

The third temptation to jump off the temple is but another variation on the same theme. If you really are God's child, then surely, God will protect you. So, let's prove it. Psalm 91 says, God will protect those God loves, so let's find out who you really are. Of course, it's only the insecure who feel the need to prove themselves. If you know who you are, then there's nothing to prove to anyone. Those who rest in the shadow of the Almighty as Psalm 91 says, they are safe and secure, and have no need for such ego games. Jesus knows who he is, that he's exactly who God said he is—chosen and beloved. What can he gain that's not already his? For Jesus, it's not about striving. It's not about trying to be 4% better or even 1% better. It's about resting in the blessed assurance that he is enough, that God is enough, that there is enough, even in the desert.

This is not a sermon about learning to resist temptation. It's not about doing more. It's not about learning to fast like Jesus did. Here's my problem with Lent. We make it primarily about us, about our sin and sacrifice, when it's about Jesus who undoes the sin of the world through the simple trust of knowing exactly who he is. That's what Lent is about. Here's the good news: it's not your job to overcome temptation. Christ has done that for you already. That's finished and complete because what happens to him happens to all of us. You are free to

rest in the blessed assurance that you belong to Christ, which means that you are chosen and beloved too. Whether you are in the desert or the garden, God's love for you is full to the brim.