
My Sermon from Sunday March 6, 2022, 'First Sunday In Lent' ~ "Our God Of Mercy"

May the God of mercy transform us by his grace. Amen.

We are already right into it. The Christian season of **Lent**. A profound season of training and discipline as we journey with Jesus to his cross of suffering and his cross of our salvation. During Lent we do self-examination and we repent. The length of Lent is 40 days which ties into the 40 years that the Hebrews wandered in the wilderness and the 40 days that Jesus spent being tempted by the devil in the wilderness.

Four Anglican priests were in retreat during Lent and they started to share their temptations with each other. The first priest said, *"I once drank an entire bottle of communion wine. I just couldn't resist."* The 2nd priest said, *"I couldn't resist the temptation to take some offering money out of the church safe. I kept telling myself that I would pay it back but it just hasn't happened."* The 3rd priest said, *"My temptation is gambling. It started small but now I am in debt for several thousand dollars for gambling on-line."* The 4th priest said, *"My temptation is gossip and please excuse me . . . I need to make some calls on my cell phone."*

Temptation. What exactly is it and how should we react? It is a course of action in which we find ourselves doing something unwise or something that will lead to dark consequences even if at the time we convince ourselves that it is OK.

I was in the *Superstore* late Friday afternoon and as I was packing my groceries, I noticed a woman going past me with her cart. We will call her 'Woman A.' She had paid for her groceries and was heading out of the store to the parking lot and her vehicle. At the next cashier, a woman was packing up her groceries and putting them in her cart. We will call her 'Woman B.' Woman B's cart was positioned so that half of it stuck out into the passageway. Without missing a beat, Woman A barreled into Woman B's jutting-out cart. Woman A pushed her way through and carried on. I could tell that Woman A was irritated that the cart was blocking her path. Woman B never said a word and carried on bagging up her groceries. Now it is true that we all have to be careful not to block the path with our carts. However, it was Friday afternoon and the store was busy and there were carts and people everywhere so it wasn't that simple to keep the grocery cart out of the way. All Woman A had to do was to stop and say to Woman B, *"Sorry but I need to get through."* I am sure that Woman B would have quickly moved her cart out of the way.



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Now we know this story doesn't compare with the 40 days of temptation that Jesus endured in the wilderness. However, there is a spiritual lesson in this story. Woman A was tempted to just barge through and I am certain that she felt that she was in the right. This is what temptation is. It is not necessarily bad things. **It is acts that we strongly believe are justified because we have been wronged.** *"Cart in the way? I have the right to bang it and push through. I am in a hurry and I had a bad day at work and that cart shouldn't be there."* I commend Woman B for not yelling or reacting to the actions of Woman A.

In this world that has gone off the rails, and where we feel helpless, we need to begin by ensuring that we resist all the daily temptations that come our way. This is how you and I make the world a better place, a meaningful place, a place filled with the Spirit of God. In this world filled with terrifying news from Ukraine, our hearts go out to all the Ukrainian people and to the many Russians who are against this senseless war and are being bombarded by propaganda each and every day. May they resist the temptation of believing the misinformation and be blessed with the truth.



Jesus fasted for 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness in Israel. This is right after his baptism and before he begins his ministry in the Galilee. The devil comes to Jesus and offers him 3 temptations ~ temptations which on the surface don't seem necessarily dark or evil.

Temptation 1: The devil says to Jesus, **turn this stone into bread.** Sounds like a good idea. Imagine turning every stone in the Galilee into bread. No more hunger for anyone ever again! Jesus says

NO ~ One does not live by bread alone.

Temptation 2: The devil leads Jesus up and shows him all the kingdoms of



the world and tells Jesus that **if you worship me (the devil), I will give you glory and authority.** On the surface it seems like a good deal. Think of all the good Jesus could do for people all around the Mediterranean. Again, Jesus says **NO ~ I am only going to worship and serve God, not you!**

Temptation 3: The devil takes Jesus to the top of the temple in Jerusalem and encourages Jesus to jump off to prove that he is truly God's son. Truly God's angels would rescue Jesus. Again, on the surface this sounds fabulous. Show people a miracle that they will never ever forget. Think of all the people who will immediately believe and turn to God. Jesus responds with an adamant **NO ~ Do not put the Lord your God to the test.**



We may not even be aware of the times when we are testing God. We just do it:

- *“Lord, if I pass this test, I promise to start coming to church.”*
- *“Holy God, if you make my mother better, I will start to tithe.”*

Temptations are put in our paths each and every day. They start small and then if we give in to them, they are compounded and we may not even realize that we are on this path that leads to destruction. We begin by thinking, *“Well, I’m not hurting anybody”* or we say, *“This was owed to me”* or *“It doesn’t matter. No one will know or care.”* I admire parents who make their child return something small to the corner store if the child took some gum and put it in their pocket for safekeeping without paying for it.

It is much easier to resist the little temptations than to resist the large temptations. That is why we pray every week in the Lord’s prayer:

“Lead me not into temptation.”

The purpose of Lent is to strengthen our souls and to build awareness of the temptations.

We have this awesome God who gives each and every one of us our salvation. In his letter to Christians in Rome, Paul writes that we begin by believing in our hearts and then we must say with our voice that Jesus Christ is Lord and that we believe in him. This is all we have to do to receive our salvation.

For the last rites for a person who is dying and who is still able to speak, I ask them to repeat after me (from the BAS p.561):

*“Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, help me.
Father, I place myself in your hands.
Holy God. I believe in you. I trust you. I love you.”*

These people are living Paul’s words. They believe and they speak and they have received their salvation.

Now of course many believers are no longer able to speak for themselves for the prayers for the dying. They are in that transitional phase between earth and heaven. And that is commendable as they have spoken the words of their faith many times throughout their life. They know where they are going.

Here is your memory verse for this Sunday, the first Sunday in Lent:

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Romans 10:13)

Our God is a God of mercy who understands what it means to be tempted. Jesus knows our struggles and how difficult it can be to resist, especially when we are tired and worn out.



As we begin Lent, may we be strengthened by our Lenten disciplines, may we resist temptations, and may we be transformed by the mercy of God into his likeness.

*“Lord Jesus, I believe in you.
I trust you.
I love you.”*

Amen.

Archdeacon Deborah+
