

“Learning to Love”

Deuteronomy 6:4-5, 6:16, 8:3

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February 18, 2018

A pastor was having breakfast alone at a conference center. There in front of him was a beautiful pewter salt and pepper set and a little creamer. In a moment of weakness, he thought, “Now that would fit easily in my suitcase. I could take that home and this place would never miss it.” Then the more he thought about it and the scandal he would create as a minister stealing these things, he thought, “I can’t do that.” So the next Sunday while he was preaching, he was on the subject of stealing and he admitted this to everyone. He said, “I want you to know that I am tempted like everyone else.” The following Sunday morning, at his study there was a little package. He unwrapped it to find a lovely pewter salt and pepper shaker and creamer. Someone in the congregation called the conference center and bought the set and gave it to him as a gift. The next Sunday he said, “I am tempted by a stunning high definition, widescreen TV.”

Temptation comes in many different forms. Sometimes temptation is obvious however most times temptation is subtle. Temptation can even be doing good things but at the wrong time or for the wrong reasons. Temptation has a lot to do with timing, wanting something now or faster. Sometimes temptation is about bigger and better. Other times it is about have one’s desires fulfilled at the expense of another’s. Webster defines, “temptation as being enticed to do wrong by promise of pleasure or gain.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “Satan does not fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God.” Temptation is when a person reads the newspaper when they were going to read the Bible. Temptation is when a person watches a television show when they were going to call a friend. Temptation is working an extra hour when they were going to play with their kids or go for a walk with their spouse. The tricky part of temptation is the enticement of the pleasure, gain or people pleasing makes the wrong almost completely unnoticeable. Often the only thing wrong with the wrong is timing. Temptation is anything that results in us not loving God and others with everything we have and are.

Jesus had just been baptized. God declared with a clear voice from heaven, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." Jesus has just had a mountaintop experience with God and is on a spiritual and emotional high. Jesus is fully God and Jesus is also fully human. Our scripture today reveals the vulnerable human nature of Jesus. Scripture says, “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness.” Jesus is beginning his ministry and leaving behind his family and the familiar. Like a college graduate who has just got their first dream job, Jesus sets off with great zeal. Jesus begins his ministry with a fast, likely as a spiritual discipline to remind him of his dependence on God. During a fast every time one desires whatever they are fasting from they pray omitting there need for spiritual nourishment and praising God for nourishing them.

The temptations we face today are still very similar to the three Jesus dealt with two thousand years ago. After 40 days Jesus was vulnerable. We are 48 days since the New Year how are you doing on your resolutions? Jesus was on a self-imposed fast from food, willingly

endured for spiritual purposes as a means to bring him closer to God. Jesus was not starving when the devil tempted him to turn a stone into a mouth watering, fresh hot loaf of bread. Jesus was hungry, but he didn't need to eat. This temptation is much like placing a hot fudge sundae in front of a struggling dieter on a stressful day just before dinner and encouraging them to enjoy it. The issue is not survival, rather it is will power and a sense of purpose. The devil is advocating an, if it feels good do it philosophy that celebrates petty indulgences. But Jesus isn't biting.

In the temptation to turn a stone into bread -- the Devil is asking Jesus to use his unique Son of God status, his gifts, to meet purely personal needs. Note that the test involves making only one loaf -- obviously for Jesus' own personal enjoyment. Turning a stone into bread, represents anytime we are tempted to use our gifts, or status, to obtain benefits solely for ourselves without considering the impact these actions will have on others or on God's plan for the world.

Pastor Bob Kaylor writes, "Does our "special status" as Americans make our insatiable appetite for consuming more and more goods, using more and more of the rest of the world's resources, limiting the possibilities for growth and health in numerous undeveloped countries, justifiable? Aren't we guilty of being successfully tempted into turning this earth into our own personal "loaf of bread"?"

Jesus resists this temptation by citing the first of three Scripture passages. Nowhere in today's text does Jesus offer an original word of his own. All words necessary to resist every temptation are supplied for him by scripture. Do you know scripture inside and out so at the moment of temptation words spring from your mind to enable you to resist the enticement?

Jesus cites **Deuteronomy 8:3** "**one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD**". Abundant life is not found in satisfying physical needs rather in trusting God and accepting God's nourishment.

The devil's second temptation reveals his ability to showcase power and pleasure. The devil lies saying he has authority over the earth and that he has the power to give it to Jesus. The world has so much pain, suffering and hurt at times it appears the devil is in control, but God is the creator, sustainer, and eternal redeemer of everyone and everything. The temptation to political power must have been enticing to Jesus who possessed a clear vision of righteousness for all. How compassionately Jesus would have used the worldly authority the tempter dangled in front of him. Jesus might have momentarily believed in this short-sighted utopia rather than God's all-encompassing plan for salvation for all, for eternity if the devil would not have asked Jesus to worship the tempter.

God alone deserves our worship. Serving, giving final authority or ultimate control to any force, book, person, group or idea other than God is idol worship. Idol worship is giving primary allegiance to such gods as status, consumerism, control, sex, money, vanity, thrilling experiences, power, looks, and on and on. Anytime we push God to the back burner in our life, we are guilty of worshiping demanding devils. The enticement to drift from God can be subtle.

Backpacking opens me to experiencing God. I enjoy worshiping God in God's beautiful creation. However, sometimes I have been tempted to worship idols on my trips, trying to see how many miles I can cover in one day or summiting a difficult mountain. Neither of these are bad in themselves, in certain situations they are good, but if the purpose of my trip is to draw closer to God then focusing on my abilities or thrill seeking is idol worship.

What the devil wants in the second temptation is what belongs to God alone—worship. Jesus again uses scripture to refute the devil’s enticing offer, “Worship the Lord your God and serve only God.”

In the third temptation the devil tries a different tact using scripture to persuade Jesus of the validity of his offer. The devil uses Psalm 91 telling of God’s continuous, protective presence to justify jumping from the temple. We need to know scripture well, so we are not lead astray by tempters who are trying to use scripture to justify their position, manipulate people, or exclude people. The third temptation involves putting God to the test that is putting requirements on our faithfulness and wanting crystal clear evidence of God’s power and love at every turn in life. It is saying if God does this or that, then I will believe and follow. Faith is faith, because it does not demand God perform on cue. Faith believes in God’s promises. Faith knows God is with us no matter what our circumstances or challenges. The devil dares Jesus to deny his humanity and to allow his divine nature full rein. If Jesus descended from the top of the temple as the swooping superman the devil envisions, surely all Jerusalem would have worshiped and adored Jesus but then the whole point of the Incarnation would have been lost. Jesus' full participation in every aspect of human life gives him the ability to identify with us, represent us, and redeem us. Once again, Jesus resists the temptation with scripture this time from **Deuteronomy 6:16**, “**Do not put the Lord your God to the test.**” Jesus' faith is secure enough that he does not need to "test" God with foolish actions.

God was already at work to provide Jesus with everything he was tempted with and much more. Impatience was the foundation of all three temptations. At the right time and place according to God’s plan: Jesus became the bread of life providing endless nourishment for all who hunger. We celebrate this at every Lord’s Supper. Jesus became King of kings and Lord of lords having authority over all the earth and all glory honor and praise are his, we proclaim this every Sunday as we worship our Triune God. The angels were involved in rescuing Jesus from death in the resurrection. Jesus has been raised up into the glory of heaven which we celebrate every Easter.

Impatience, we want something that is really quite innocent in itself - a piece of bread, a chance to be a leader, a sign from God - but we get into trouble because we want it now. We are unwilling to wait for it, so we take shortcuts - and end up in trouble. The solution is to know and trust in the promises of God, so you can resist the lure of the moment trusting that God will fully satisfy you in the fullness of time. This is agonizingly difficult. We are sick, we want to be healed now. God promises a heathy abundant eternal life. We are hurting from broken relationships. God promises harmony with all people. We fear. God promises peace. We hurt. God promises joy. Life is a mess. God promises our life will be perfect. I certainly do not know why we need to wait for any of these wonderful things. Impatience is the root of many temptations. Our scripture ends with, “when the devil had finished every test, he departed from Jesus until an opportune time” That is scary. We are tempted to want good gifts now. Our impatience diminishes us.

Lent is a time to examine your life. Are you impatient? Are you forgetting that you are a beloved child of God? Are you trying to be successful more than faithful? Are you dazzled more by the riches and pleasures of the world than by the power, glory and eternal love of God? Are you standing on Christ the solid rock or are you on shifting sand? Do you worship God alone or do you try to worship a variety of gods? When suffering and sacrifice is called for, do

you feel God's presence and trust God's redemptive eternal plan? When the way is difficult and the future uncertain, do you trust that God has a wonderful plan for you on the horizon? Jesus shows that the key is to be faithful to the call and purpose of God. Jesus embodies and fulfills every aspect of **Deuteronomy 6:4-5** "**The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.**"

Jesus full of the Holy Spirit went into the wilderness to fast, so he could grow closer to God then Jesus got tired, hungry, and temptations clamored to distract him. On this first Sunday of lent, recommit yourself to loving God with all you are and all you have. Know that you will be tempted but use scripture to resist and keep your faith in Jesus your refuge and strength. Jesus has been in our shoes and will deliver us if we are patient and trust in him. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and might. Amen