

Getting Tempted

With the texts are that assigned in the Revised Common Lectionary for this the First Sunday in Lent, it's tempting to do a compare & contrast style sermon, looking at the two temptation stories, noticing the differences, especially the different responses of Jesus and Adam to their temptations. Since I never really liked these kinds of assignments in school, I will take a different approach today and leave the comparing & contrasting to others.

Since Satan is a major player in both temptation stories, we should take a look at how Satan tempts. First off, we see that Satan is crafty, assuming a form that appears to be friendly. Satan is also bold as he is unafraid to tempt even the Son of God. Even though Satan may appear differently at different times, his main approach is to first cast doubt on our relationship with God. Satan asked Eve, "Did God really say ...?" and to Jesus, Satan said, "If you are the Son of God" In each case, Satan cracks open a possible moment of doubt in our minds, making what is presented next to sound plausible. In tempting humanity, the doubt is centered around what God had said or did for us, intimating that maybe God is not being totally open with us, that maybe God is withholding something from us. Satan makes it seem as if God is afraid that humans would be like God. In tempting the Son of God, Satan naturally cannot take that approach, but approached Jesus with a question of identity.

The temptations that we face can be put into several categories. One category could be called "Desires of the Flesh" and would include Satan's 'suggestion' that Jesus turn the stones into bread after Jesus' fast. These temptations usually relate to some sort of bodily need that is unmet. The second category would be one

of earthly power, ruling over kingdoms and people everywhere. Another category would be that it looks pleasing, similar to Eve seeing that the fruit of the forbidden tree looked good. The desire to acquire 'the finer things in life' would fall into this category. Another category would be to be convinced that "I really deserve this, so I should have it" whether or not one truly deserves it. A final category would be one that actually uses us as a conduit to test God's promise of protection. The temptation of Jesus to throw Himself off the steeple of the temple would be an example of this kind of temptation. We could say that when we bargain with God, "God if you let me win the lottery, even if I don't buy a ticket, then I will give the church 10%" would be an example of how Satan tempts us with this kind of temptation. Some temptations, like the temptation of Adam and Eve, could be placed into more than one category. What category a temptation fits into is not the important thing, however, what is important is that we learn how to recognize the different ways in which we are tempted and learn how to resist those temptations.

Regardless of the kind of temptation, what we are typically promised is a shortcut to what we want, need, or think we deserve. It may even be presented as a shortcut to getting what God wants. For example, the promise of Satan to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world by not dying, but simply by worshipping Satan would be an example of this. We want the "American Idol" dream of getting what we want as soon as possible, without necessarily putting in the time and effort of achieving it on our own.

Besides using any combination of different temptations, Satan may also take something that is good and twist it around, confusing us, making us think that we are doing good while in actuality, we are doing something selfish. Satan tries to promise

us something which Satan cannot deliver because it is not Satan's in the first place to do with how Satan chooses.

In his book "The Screwtape Letters," C.S. Lewis writes from the perspective of the devil and the lengths that he goes to tempt us. Lewis portrays that as a person gets closer to God, the devil actually turns up his efforts, knowing that if the person stays fixed on God, then the person will be totally 'lost' to God may even get others to follow God as well, something the devil does not want to happen. So while we may think it may be 'easier' to resist temptation the closer we get to God, the devil actually becomes more persistent in trying to get us to turn away from God. It is only by keeping our focus on God and the path which God has set for us that we can resist the temptations of the devil.

As we stand at the threshold of this year's Lenten journey, today's texts give a glimpse of what lies ahead for us: we see two paths, two options for living. One path follows Jesus, it is a path of faith & trust in God, recognizing that it goes through the 'valleys of the shadow of death;' knowing it can be rough, but for our sake, there can be no shortcuts. God can and will get us through it. The other path says that we can do it alone, thinking that somehow God may have withheld something from us, maybe even purposefully making it harder for us. This path shows us things that are glittery and looking desirable, becoming convinced that it is something we deserve to have and that it is on an 'easy' path and so we grasp for it. If we get it, we do whatever it takes to keep it for ourselves. Unfortunately, we realize, sometimes too late, that all that glitters is not gold and that which we thought we were getting is not even close to what we have. Fortunately for us, God is a forgiving God and through Jesus Christ, will always bring us back to the path that God knows is best for us. A path that takes us to life eternal with God.

While we will always have these two options before us, may we remember to follow Jesus' example, remaining steadfast in our faith, knowing that there are no shortcuts, no 'get rich quick schemes' to following God's ways, trusting God that things will turn out for better than the best.

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/IBx41XpTmSg>

Service: https://youtu.be/zr2V_21B9HY