

Lent 1 C Sermon
Luke 4:1-13
March 6, 2022

“Knowing Thyself”
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Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” ⁴Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’” ⁵Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” ⁸Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord, and serve only God.’” ⁹Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written, ‘God will command the angels concerning you, to protect you,’ ¹¹and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” ¹²Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ¹³When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

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A man was trying to lose weight and decided that it was best if he not drive past his favorite bakery, Harner’s of course, on the way to work each day. So he took an alternative route. This worked well for some time. But one day he absentmindedly took his old route to work. When he realized what he was doing, he thought, “This must be a sign from the Lord.” So

he kept driving. But just to make sure he wasn't deceiving himself he said, "I'll drive past, and if there's a parking spot, I'll take it as a sign from the Lord that God wants me to buy something there." And the funny thing was, on the eighth time around...¹



The Jesus of Luke's gospel knows what it's like to face temptation. Our text begins with Jesus being led by the Spirit into the wilderness after his baptism for a 40-day retreat . . . without anything to eat. The devil, the tempter, enters the scene when Jesus is at a physical low—literally starved. "Why not use your God-given power and turn these stones into bread?" the devil taunted. Without skipping a beat, Jesus quotes a perfectly-chosen scripture and stands firm. The devil changes tact and transports Jesus to a high place looking out over the countryside. "See this? It can all be yours," he jeered. "Bow down at my feet and I'll give it to you." Once again, Jesus unyieldingly recalls another timely text from scripture. Still undeterred, the devil tries again, taking Jesus to the top of the Jerusalem temple. "Why not throw yourself down from here? God's angels will rescue you," the devil goaded. Equipped with yet another scripture, Jesus quickly disarms the tempter once again. The devil finally withdraws to the shadows, waiting for a more opportune time.

While our temptations may look different than Jesus', we do all face them, right? They're not all big temptations like his were: using our power for personal gain, or bowing to an unlikeable boss for a quick promotion, or testing our loved ones to see just how far they'll go to show us their love. Sometimes our temptations are smaller: that Harner's donut on the way to work, a little creative accounting on our income taxes, use of music without proper permission, or that all-to-convenient white lie to parents or partner. Chances are, when faced with

¹"Sermon Illustrations: Temptation," Hotsermons.com, <https://hotsermons.com/sermon-illustrations/sermon-illustrations-temptation.html>.

temptations, big or little, most of us are unlikely to rattle off a well-chosen Bible verse in hopes of besting the devil at his little game of “Gotcha!” Though, promising to enhance your biblical knowledge might make our upcoming Adult Lenten study seem more attractive to some of you! No, when we face temptations, we’re unlikely to respond with scripture and more likely to weigh the possible benefits with the possible consequences and make an informed choice. Or, in the case of the donut, sometimes we just yield in the moment, regardless of the cost.

One thing is certain, to be tempted is to be human and, at least at some level, to be human is to be tempted. It just is. Whether you think the tempting is being done by a devil, bent on trumping your morals or best intentions, or you think that temptation is simply a short-term lapse in judgement, temptation still happens to all of us. Always will. “So, if temptation is unavoidable,” you may be thinking, “what’s the point of preaching a whole sermon on it?” Because, acknowledging the universality of temptation reminds us that:

1. We don’t face our demons alone. Not that misery loves company, but there is something comforting in knowing that while we may all be facing different things, everyone is facing something.
2. Sometimes we succumb to temptation. And the truth is, everyone sometimes succumbs to temptation.
3. Each temptation is another opportunity to learn about ourselves.
4. Each temptation is another opportunity to grow—to get it right. We will get, and we will need, lots of do-overs.

The story of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness may be better understood by us as a metaphor for human struggling than a historical record of particular events. Not that Jesus wasn’t tempted, but this story has deeper more universal truths for us today: all of us are tempted; our individual temptations are unique to us, but everyone faces temptation;

each temptation provides an opportunity to learn about ourselves; each temptation provides an opportunity to grow—to get it right. In the story, Jesus overcame temptation not because he was perfect, but because he understood himself, understood the nature of his calling, understood who he was in relation to the world around him and the people around him. This text invites us to do the same—to take an honest look at ourselves; to *know* ourselves.

The season of Lent is, after all, meant to be a season of honesty. It starts on Ash Wednesday with an honest acknowledgement of our mortality, our place in the cycle of life, and an invitation to live fully and well in light of this truth. It's followed up today with an honest acknowledgement that every human experiences temptation, and an open invitation for us to name the temptations we face and claim them as opportunities for self-knowledge and growth. And, as the season continues, we'll be faced with more honest acknowledgements, tough truths, and opportunities for growth. Lent is, after all, a season for honesty.

To be honest, I feel a little better just talking about all this! There's something deeply freeing in acknowledging my humanity—my mortality—and claiming each day as an opportunity to learn through my experiences, my struggles, and my temptations; an opportunity to grow and get it right; an opportunity for me to live fully and well—this and every day. Perhaps, each week during this season of honesty, instead of feeling worse about those things that make us human, we will actually learn to accept them for the opportunities that they present—for learning, for growth, for becoming even more fully and completely the human each of us is destined to be.

Don't beat yourself up for being human. Learn. Grow. And live each day fully and well. May it be so. Amen.