

**SERMON:** *“The Temptation of Jesus.”*

Rev. Geoff Ross: Sunday, March 6, 2022, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church

Today we begin the season of Lent – the forty days that lead up to Easter echo the forty days of Jesus’ struggle/testing in the wilderness, a story that had its parallels/antecedents in Moses’ forty days without food on the mountain/Elijah’s forty days on the mountain of God/the forty years of Israel’s struggle/testing in the wilderness following their exodus from Egypt – recounted in Deuteronomy (quoted three times in our reading this morning). Lent is also rooted to the Jewish religious festival of Passover as a time of preparation/faith. Along with all the food/sacrifices/homes/temples/laws that had to be prepared/cooked/cleaned/sanctified/carried out, each faithful Jew was required to prepare/make clean/purify/correct themselves/lives through reflection/confession and resubmission to the God who promise/delivered their salvation. This is why, Lent – as we know it – is a time of reflection/confession and profession/reevaluation, of taking stock of who we are and what we believe/ and of turning away from the temptations of the world and re-turning toward God.

In other words, Lent is a time of testing – of being tested/tempted, and of choices. Unfortunately, being tested isn’t something we like to do in our comfortable cocoon-like world where we do anything to avoid adversity/pain/work. Sadly avoidance doesn’t work (it’s also a choice): regardless of who we are; we can’t abdicate our responsibility/avoid being tempered by the fire of trial – because it is only by passing through the crucible/test that we temper ourselves – just as His testing tempered/shaped Jesus as He defined His identity as the Son of God. And that is the Good News of Lent:we don’t have to go through it alone! Which is why Lent is also about the command to ‘remember’ God’s plan/purpose for us/faithfulness – especially when we’re tempted by seemingly easier choices!

*[“Temptation”:ME/OF – Latin/ “temptare”= ‘handle/test/try’ – the desire/urge to do something/wrong/unwise. Also: “lure/entice/seduce” “Test”: Latin/ “jug/shell/clay pot”- “crucible”/used to treat/melt/‘test’ gold/silver to melt/burn away impurities.... Temptation/Siren call that whispers to our desires/fears/wants – but to be “tested” is to made pure through fire!]*

To be blunt, the wilderness/Hell is a craven, uniquely personal, place and the temptations of the wilderness are its Sirens whose whispered songs/calls seek out our weaknesses/undermine all that we believe/trust/hold dear by singing to the doubt that shakes the foundation of belief/fear that cripples the expression of love/suspicion that poisons relationships/taints how we see the world/infects how we relate to others; their songs lure/entice/seduce us until, in a moment of

wavering/faltering belief/trust/faith, they wreck/upend/upset our lives. This is in this/His wilderness where the temptation of Jesus took place.

Today's reading from Luke sets the stage/tone for the upcoming season of Lent: it prepares us for the trial/journey ahead – as we wrestle with our own temptations/walk with Jesus as He is drawn to the Cross. It also provides us with examples of how we are each tempted/how the power of evil is real. *[Passage – clearest example of how evil exists in the world/opposition to love/health/wholeness/peace.]* This text forces us to acknowledge, as Christians, that evil does not go away by our avoiding it/closing our eyes/smiling – the addictions still gnaw/blood still flows/our brokenness still remains. In fact, those called by God/committed to living out God's will/way who will be tested/tempted/tried more often/acutely! After all, if Jesus wrestled with temptation and sin, why should we think we would be exempt from the fray?

*[Luck vs Choice:salvation-nothing to do with luck/about choices:choose good/evil-life/death. Surrounded by temptation/all tempted/have a choice – left/right, goats/sheep, bad/good, death/life. Not easy/hard work – just ask Jesus!]* Each of the three temptations that Jesus faced – turning stones into bread/attaining earthly/political power/testing God – mirrored Jesus' baptismal commission and His response defined Jesus' ministry and even foreshadow His journey to the Cross. Each test was a direct attack on the pillars of Jesus' just-professed/proclaimed mission/ministry/plan/purpose – even if it meant that His life would end on the Cross He was now moving/drawn inexorably toward – but He consciously made a choice! And so do we!

As we move toward the Table – and the celebration of Communion/God's fulfillment of His promise of salvation/resurrection from death – let us remember that even though He was tempted, Jesus refused to focus on His desires/wants – Himself, but placed His trust/hope/faith/life in God. And as we journey through Lent/drawn to the Cross, let us be like Jesus and focus our hearts/minds/lives on God/God's will for us/worship the Lord God, and serve only Him. If we can do this, then we have begun our journey. Amen.