

**The Temptation of Lent**  
**Luke 4:1-13**  
**Romans 10:8b-13**

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**First Sunday of Lent**

Growing up in a small NC town, I knew about the seasons. I knew about winter, spring, summer and fall. I knew them because they pretty much aligned with the important seasons—football, basketball and baseball.

Those were the seasons for me!

Church seasons were unknown. Not really. We had two seasons, Christmas and Easter. Those were the times in which we collected our missions offerings; the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for Foreign Missions, and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for Home Missions. Named for the patron saints of Southern Baptist life; ironically because neither of them would have been allowed to preach in a Southern Baptist Church.

As I grew, however, I learned about other seasons. I now know about hockey season, lacrosse, and soccer—which really doesn't have a season. Soccer is eternal!

And I learned about the seasons of the church year. It came slowly as the banners in Davis Chapel would change colors, from green to red briefly, then back to green and then to purple to white to green to purple and back to green again. I learned it wasn't just a change in decor, some variety, but a visible way of walking through the seasons of church.

Advent, to Christmastide, to Epiphany, to Lent, Easter, and then to Ordinary Time—which is like soccer forever!a

I had never known any of these. They were new to me. I discovered that each season brought with it a unique mood, a different way of learning the God story.

We have moved into a new season this week. Lent. It slid in earlier this week with Ash Wednesday, that wonderful service in which we are marked with a cross on our forehead with that reminder, *"You are dust, and to dust you shall return."* We were invited *"in the name of the Church to the observance of a holy Lent, by self examination and repentance, by prayer, fasting, and self denial, and by reading and meditation upon God's holy Word."*

With that happy happy joy joy invitation you can understand why so many people I know, good church people, just tell me, I don't do Lent!

Too often it is seen as a time of giving something up—chocolate, dessert, pizza, French Fries (two of my favorites to give up.). I know some people who give up social media. One year our daughter gave up television. (I joked that I don't love Jesus that much!)

Lent is a time to give up....something.

So I understand why we might not want to “do Lent.” There is a sense in which we have been living in the season of Lent for the past 2 years! It was in Lent that we experience our first Covid lockdown in 2020. We have been forced to give up vacations, and family get togethers and proms and dinners out and shopping trips and even worship. We have given up handshakes and hugs. Enough Lent, eh?

But that might be the very reason we need Lent this year. Lent comes from the Old English word meaning spring. In some parts of the world that aren’t covered with snow, Lent is the time in which you can begin digging in the garden, getting it ready for planting, for blooming. We need this season in order to prepare ourselves for the new growth that God has in store for us.

Let’s be honest. It isn’t an easy season! As we heard it is a season of self examination and repentance, of taking stock of our lives to ask the what really matters question. It is an important question for us as individuals. Even if you are Jesus.

It is the first story post-baptism event that Luke shares in his telling of the Jesus story. It isn’t what we would expect. Jesus is baptized; and *“the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’”*<sup>1</sup>

God is well pleased! Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit!

Does it get any better than that? So let’s have a party! Let’s celebrate!

But that isn’t what happens! Instead, the spirit, that same spirit that had descended like a dove, led him into the wilderness here he was tempted by the devil.

Mark is even more harsh! Mark says that the spirit drove him into the wilderness, using the same word that he uses to describe how Jesus drove the merchants from the temple!

The spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, into the very clutches of the devil. For 40 days he was tempted—Luke doesn’t say how. We can just imagine, project our own temptations on to Jesus. How do you imagine Jesus being tempted.

It went on for 40 days. During that time Jesus did not eat, and then, in one of the great “Duh Huh” moments of the Bible, Luke says *“when they were over he was famished.”*

Really?

But note that it is then that what we have typically called the temptations begin. That isn’t what Luke says. He said the temptation lasted the 40 days when Jesus was in the wilderness. Another one of those little “huh” moments that come when we actually read the Bible, instead of just knowing what it says!

And when we come to the “temptations,” I find it interesting that the temptations don’t fit in our definition. Jesus is offered a way to get food; a way to make a difference in the world; a way to become famous.

Are any of those bad?

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 3:21-22. NRSV

What would you do if you were offered a way to feed not only yourself, but so many more? Just do what you can do Jesus! After all, you will use your power to feed 5,000 in just a few chapters, so why not practice now. You wouldn't want to be embarrassed your first time trying this, right?

And what would you do if you had the power and authority to change the world? What if you could bring peace to Ukraine, to the Middle East, to your family? Wouldn't you do it? Jesus, you say that you have come to bring peace, so here is your chance!

And isn't fame the ultimate goal in our world? We have people famous for being famous. Can anyone tell me what the Kardashians do? But they influence the world! Imagine what good you could do!

Jesus, why not capitalize on the fame you could have. You will draw multitudes; you will have people seeking to make you their king! Why not do it now?

Food.

Power.

Influence.

Is there anything wrong with them?

The answer is no. There isn't anything intrinsically wrong with any of them. And that is the great temptation of our lives, isn't it? Rarely, if ever are we confronted with the choice of good and evil.

The choice is never between sainthood and infamy; war and peace, love and hate, right and wrong. We never have a devil on one shoulder and an angel on the other telling us what we should do. If it were only that easy!

Instead the choice we usually face is between two goods. It is the choice between:

- Working late to get extra money for a vacation and eating dinner with the family;
- Going on vacation and saving for retirement;
- Saving for retirement and financially supporting a nonprofit you care about.

It is the choice we make between:

- going for a walk or sitting down and watching the news;
- Watching the news or spending time with your family.
- Opening time with your family or working to make their world better.

It is the choice we make for our families;

- The choice between homework or playing with friends;
- The choice of school or sports;
- The choice of sports or church.

I hope you see what I am saying. There isn't a choice between good and evil here! There isn't anything wrong with a vacation. God knows that Jesus sought time away from

the work of being the Messiah! There isn't anything wrong with watching or reading the news. How else are we to discover what God is doing in the world and how we might partner? There isn't anything wrong with playing soccer or hockey or curing or tennis or taking ballet or piano or or or.

There wasn't anything wrong with any of the choices offered Jesus. What was important was his choice and what it said about him, about who he was.

Know thyself said Socrates. Know who you are. Eric Erikson, the developmental psychologist believed that this is one of the crucial questions which each one of us must grapple if we are to grow into mature adults. After we deal with the issues of trust and autonomy and initiative and industry we come to the critical question of identity. Who am I? Without an answer to the "Who am I?" question, we cannot give ourselves to another person, we cannot find work that is meaningful, we cannot live a life of integrity.

Who are you?

Who are you Jesus? How are you going to live your life? What is going to be of ultimate importance to you? What is the ground of your being, your ultimate concern? What kind of Messiah are you going to be?

Those same questions come to us. Who are you? How are you going to live your life? What is going to be of ultimate importance to you? What is the ground of your being, your ultimate concern? What kind of disciple of Jesus are you going to be?

These are not easy questions. They don't come with easy answers. And not that this wasn't the last time Jesus had to confront them. Luke says that the devil left him for another time.

These questions come back to us again and again and again! And every time we have to answer. And every time they call into question our integrity, our faithfulness, our very being.

And we won't always get it right! In fact, perhaps the most we can hope for is 75%. There are those times when your kids just wear you down. There are times when the boss gives an ultimatum that, well. There are times when we are just too tired.

And in those times, well we fall on the grace of God; the grace that says, pick yourself up, dust yourself off and try again.

This isn't suppose to be easy. Following Jesus means living an alternative story, going against the grain. It is hard. It's a challenge. To paraphrase one of my favorite shows these days, Ted Lasso, *"It is a lot like riding a horse, isn't it? If you're comfortable while you're doing it, you're probably doing it wrong."*<sup>2</sup>

But the more you ride a horse, the more natural it becomes. The more you make a consistent choice, the more it becomes who you are.

Every day.

Every decision.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://people.com/tv/ted-lasso-inspirational-quotes/>

It says who you are.

That is the temptation of Lent. The temptation of every day.