

# Sermon: Lent 1

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March 5, 2017

Year A

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Psalm 32

Romans 5:12-19

Matthew 4:1-11

*Whenever you pray... go into your room and shut the door... and pray to the One whose light shines through you...*

Lent began four days ago... and I suggested on Ash Wednesday... I lifted up the image... that during Lent... the church goes into its room... to pray... to look inward... and as the Alcoholics Anonymous people suggest... to take a fearless moral inventory...

Because we hear stories today... about the beginnings of moral consciousness... about our earliest human ancestors... at least the ones we know in scripture... Adam and Eve... certainly mythological... but also representing humanity... representing us... then and now... all of us... and how we are... how we struggle... how we are tempted... to rise up beyond ourselves... how even in the Garden... even when everything was provided for us... when instinct was sufficient... even then... we were invited into more... invited into moving away from clearly defined boundaries... into self-awareness... into a relationship with God of our choosing... of love freely given and not coerced... into the messy... middle ground of life... moving away from Father Knows Best families... into real families... moving away from what looks good on paper... into our lives as they are... moving away from pretending that everything's OK... and into acknowledging that we need God...

We hear in today's Epistle... that separated from God... we do those things we are not meant to do... and that as those who miss the mark... as those who fall short of the fullness for which God created us... as those who judge each other... and sometimes even God... by our dimwitted human standards... and who think of ourselves too often... we die... but we don't die because... as Paul implies... only one Man... only

one human being... who lived... only God knows... how long ago... we don't die because only one A-dom... one earth creature... ate a piece of fruit from a tree that ought to have been ugly and not *a delight to the eyes*... that ought to have been wrapped several times with yellow police tape... we don't die because some weak woman... gave in to the sweet hissings of a snake with legs... in fact... Eve told the serpent that God had said not to even touch the tree... but in Genesis 2:16-17... God's command to Adam says nothing about touching the tree... *just be sure you don't eat of it*... the Rabbis figured Adam had made that part up... after all... he was there first... maybe he had some sense of ownership... like *leave my stuff alone*... but that serpent stood up on it's hind legs and shook the tree so hard... that fruit fell... came within arm's length... came into easy reach... and faith was made harder than it had to be... we die because we were created out of the dust of stars... and to dust we shall return...

And today's Gospel is that familiar story... in which the Spirit leads Jesus out into the wilderness... and the adversary... the enemy... the devil tempts him...

Jesus feeds 5,000... so clearly he values the food that sustains the body... but in this particular exchange... he remembers Israel's experiences in the dessert... their grumblings about hunger... and the misguided... mistaken connections they made between full stomachs and God's love... *if only you really loved us God... you'd feed us what we want*...

Jesus can walk on water... but on the pinnacle of the Temple... he is asked to choose between testing God's love for him and suspending the laws of gravity... Jesus knows that it's bad form to purposely put himself in danger... so God will be forced to intervene... and the crowds will be duly impressed...

Jesus is the Beloved Son... but no amount of political power and influence... can serve as a substitute for the first commandment... Jesus loves the Lord his God... with all his

heart... soul... strength... and mind... and all the kingdoms and power in the world can't even come close...

The Rev. Nurya Love Parish... writing in The Christian Century magazine... writes: "*The tradition teaches that these temptations stand for pride, power, and possession.*" *When I first became a Christian... I didn't know much about Jesus, the devil, or that desert, but I knew pride... I knew the desire for power... I knew the wish for possessions... I was familiar with all of them... from painful experience.*

*I began by recognizing myself in the temptations... but I soon realized that I was meant also to recognize myself in the responses that Jesus makes in return... when tempted to put himself first... he puts God first.. He puts spiritual nourishment above bodily nourishment... trust in God above testing God... faithfulness to God above wealth. He places his relationship with the eternal above all—far above the temptations the devil offers... he does all this without a single second's thought... in total unity with God the Father... she wrote...*

When metal is forged in a furnace... it is tested... not so that the blacksmith can ridicule or punish it... but to make sure that it's worthy and ready... for the task at hand... the temptations about which we hear today... test us... to make sure we are ready for what comes next... for our increasing role as co-creators... the scripture that has been written by many men... and I hope at least she women... now writes us as well...

Today's Jewish and Christian stories represent our fierce independence... our brokenness... and our ultimate reliance on God... whether we're in the Garden of Eden... or in a desert wilderness... in the Garden... Adam and Eve may have thought that if they knew everything Good and everything Evil... they'd have no need for God... that may be why God said... let's get them out of here *pronto* before they start eating from the Tree of Life...

In the wilderness... in our Lenten wilderness... in the place where we shut the door and pray... we remove ourselves from distraction... we eliminate society's mindless chatter... and we enter a place to be still... and know God... and know our holy dependence on Her...

Preaching professor Jason Byassee wrote: Christian theology has often spoken as though Adam's disaster were universal... and Christ's grace repairs things only somewhat... "Hogwash..." Paul says... sin and brokenness are meager... our rebellion against God is only temporary... only partially successful... and fully pathetic... rather than victorious... Christ's grace is wider reaching... impacts us more deeply... and is more expansive in its redemption... by far...

In our baptismal covenant... we promise that we will *persevere in resisting evil... and when we fall into sin... we will repent and return to the Lord...* we have all fallen into a ditch... we have fallen into a grave... but Jesus comes... and digs us out... and raises us up again... not because we deserve it... but because it pleases God greatly... to do so... it's not by our own effort that we achieve this... it's through God's love...

Mike+