**Sermon Lent I
February 26, 2023**

“Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”

We say, “Lead us not into temptation”; but then, thanks to Oscar Wilde, we also say, “I can resist everything except temptation”.

But everything in the current culture gives us permission to enter into temptation immediately—even as we are urged to resist it. We are so contradictory.

What does it mean to be tempted? Temptation pulls us away from the purpose for which we are created: -----to be in relationship with God.

Temptation makes us forget to walk humbly with our God, to forget to love mercy and to do justice. Sometimes we take the easy road and just give in.

Today’s gospel story of the temptations of Jesus is important to us because it is so much a part of our own experience, ----since we are exposed to temptation daily.

Jesus’ first temptation deals with the immediate physical needs of the body – an inescapable reality for all of us.

It is significant that this particular temptation comes when Jesus is famished and physically at his weakest. The tempter doesn’t say, “All right, I’ll give you bread, but you will have to work for me today.” That would have been a reasonable request.

What makes it temptation is the miraculous shortcut the tempter proposes: ---“Use your powers as the Son of God to change these stones into bread.” What is implied is that if it doesn’t work, then he will doubt his relationship with God.

How many times do we, too, look for shortcuts----or question and doubt a God that would let people go hungry—or die in natural disasters, or violence?

Of course, Jesus did know that humans need nourishment or else he wouldn’t have felt compassion for the poor and hungry. He commands us to feed the hungry. It is the emphasis we put on this temporal body that he warns us against.

These days, with the emphasis on a toned body, with surgical interventions to make it perfect, the body has become an idol for millions of people the world over. We have been warned against this kind of idolatry. We must not give into the temptation of allowing the needs of our bodies to overwhelm our need for the word of God.

The second temptation is the use of scripture in order to test God-- and it’s familiar to us. We tend to bargain with God quite often. We whine and complain to God about our individual concerns. “But Jesus said, ‘Ask and it shall be given, knock and the door will be opened,’ so why doesn’t God give me my heart’s desire? Why doesn’t God answer my prayers? Why doesn’t God punish the evildoers and reward the righteous?”

These questions almost always end up in the form of bargaining or testing. “Do what I think is right, God, and I will believe in you.” Or
 “Answer this prayer, God, and I’ll be good forever and ever.”

We don’t take into account the interconnectedness of creation when we put God to the test. *We don’t* get to know what’s in God’s plan.

What if God answered the prayers of so many in our country who claim the name of Christ and ask for the destruction of enemies? What would happen to the world?

The answer that Jesus gives is that even when we ask for things using the words of scripture, --- putting God to the test is yielding to the temptation of the easy fix without considering the consequences.

The third temptation is the one that has brought us to the brink of disaster time and time again – the terrible, seductive call of power. How easy it would have been for Jesus, weakened from hunger, all alone in the unforgiving desert, to forget to whom he truly belonged. That has happened to many people.

Look at the inequality of wealth in our country and the world. Look at people starving while their leaders hold on to power, storing billions in the Caymans or Switzerland.

Ah, the temptation of power that comes with wealth. How well Jesus knew the fatal results of giving in to the worship of other gods – the gods of greed, of luxury, of controlling others. All you have to do, Satan tells him, is forget that you belong to God.

How easy it is for us to believe that we are in control—that we are our own gods.

Jesus rejects this temptation outright. Only God is worthy of our worship, he tells us; only God deserves our service. It is after this firm answer that the devil departs and leaves Jesus alone.

If Jesus yielded to this temptation, he would secure his own survival, but there would be no need for the cross.

The powers of this world claim God to be on their side, making their own power, their own political ends, their own way of seeing the world, into God's way of seeing the world with no regard whatsoever whether it is God's way or not.

The only weapon Jesus uses against the powers of this world is the Word: the only sword Jesus ever draws is the sword of the Spirit.

Jesus says no to the temptation of violence and domination.

 The powers must crucify Jesus because of the "no" he speaks to their ways, to their ideologies, to the false securities they promise. The powers can only deliver death and destruction.

Only Jesus can deliver life.