

“Welcome to Lent”

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

Human beings were formed with great care, to be in relationship with the creator, creation, and one another. The serpent's promise to the first couple that their eyes would be opened led, ironically, to the discovery only that they were naked.

¹⁵The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”

^{3:1}Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” ²The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” ⁴But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; ⁵for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” ⁶So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Psalm 32

¹Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sin is put away!

**²Happy are they to whom the Lord imputes no guilt,
and in whose spirit there is no guile!**

³While I held my tongue, my bones withered away,
because of my groaning all day long.

**⁴For your hand was heavy upon me day and night;
my moisture was dried up as in the heat of summer.**

⁵Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and did not conceal my guilt. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.” Then you forgave me the guilt of my sin.

**⁶Therefore all the faithful will make their prayers to you in time of trouble;
when the great waters overflow, they shall not reach them.**

⁷You are my hiding-place; you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance.

**⁸“I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go;
I will guide you with my eye.**

⁹Do not be like horse or mule, which have no understanding;
who must be fitted with bit and bridle, or else they will not stay near you.”

**¹⁰Great are the tribulations of the wicked;
but mercy embraces those who trust in the Lord.**

**¹¹Be glad, you righteous, and rejoice in the Lord;
shout for joy, all who are true of heart.**

Second Reading: Romans 5:12-19 or 5:12, 17-19

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned—sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Gospel: Matthew 4:1-11 ¹Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" ⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" ⁷Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" ¹¹Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Welcome to Lent....

Today's gospel tells of Jesus' temptation in the desert. His forty-day fast becomes the basis of our Lenten pilgrimage. In the early church Lent was a time of intense

preparation for those to be baptized at the Easter Vigil. This catechetical focus on the meaning of faith is at the heart of our Lenten journey to the baptismal waters of Easter. Hungry for God's mercy, we receive the bread of life to nourish us for the days ahead. (Sundays and Seasons, March 5th)

Each year, the First Sunday in Lent – and you will note that we say “Sundays *‘in’* Lent, not *‘of’* Lent – we begin with a Gospel account of the temptation of Jesus.

First, the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus at his baptism, then the same Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. It would be different if the devil pursued Jesus, but scripture says that the Spirit of God *led* Jesus to this place of temptation, so it seems to have been part of the divine plan that he should undergo these trials.

There are three temptations – turn these stones into bread...it is only too easy to mistrust God, to assume God will not provide, to feel we have to be in charge of everything...to which we hear Jesus' words, "you shall not live by bread alone.."

Next, "Throw yourself down from the temple, and see if God will rescue you..."how often do we live dangerously – extreme sports, drugs, exhausting lifestyles, even the simple act of driving too fast, as if on some level or other we are testing God – see I will be reckless, and I expect you to fix it for me God; I don't want to be responsible for my life....and finally,

"Worship me and all this will be yours...." "...Drink this, eat that, lose weight, wear these clothes, buy that truck, the one you have is simply not big enough, and where will the vacation be this year?..."...bigger, better, more, more, more....we clamour like spoiled children.... Until we hear the firm voice of Jesus:

...*"Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'*"

Jesus hears Satan's words through the delirium of his hunger, and realizes in that moment that he does not need what Satan offers. *He is the Son of God*, and it is *God* who ensures his earthly needs are met, it is *God* who protects and defends, it is *God* who is to be worshipped and glorified, for all other so-called "gods" are mere idols – sham artists who feed our egos and desires in the moment, perhaps, but like a birthday party sugar rush, leaving us drained and disappointed in the long run....

Leading us into the Gospel is the age-old story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden:

¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in

the day that you eat of it you shall die.”

⁴But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; ⁵for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” ⁶So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.

⁷Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Their nakedness is not only physical, for once having eaten of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they – and we - become metaphorically naked - to each other and to God. For gone is the innocence of youth, the not having a care in the world, the basking forever in the idyllic delights of the garden. No, eating of the fruit shows us our humanity, and the limits of our humanity, that we will grow tired, and frustrated, and not be able to have and do everything we think we want, and one day we will die. In short, that bite of fruit reveals to us in sharp relief that we are not God, that we are finite, human beings. *Remember mortal, you are dust, and to dust you shall return....*, as we heard only too clearly a few short days ago on Ash Wednesday.

And when we, too, come to ourselves and realize the emptiness of the never-ending temptations of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, when we can truly and humbly say, “God is God, and I am not...”, when we realize and accept that *we, too* are beloved children of God, *then will* the temptation leave us and the holy angels will serve us.

We join in Jesus’ humanity when we conquer evil with the power of the Word of God, the Word that comes to us in the flesh of Jesus of Nazareth. And we come to worship to hear that Word, be renewed in knowledge and truth, and to be nourished at the table of the Eternal One “the body of Christ, given for you, the blood of Christ, shed for you...bread of heaven, cup of salvation....”

Being baptized is not *insurance* against these challenges and trials. Being baptized does not make life easier. Instead, it complicates life. Baptism leads you to care about people on the far side of the world, people you will never meet or know. Baptism calls you to work for justice and peace. Daily we are tempted to ignore the needs of the world in favor of our own comfort, our own worries, our own needs. When we, on the other hand, ignore that call to self-indulgence and instead reach out to others, we explicitly and implicitly live out our baptismal covenant.

By the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus has turned all the devil's temptations on their heads. He feeds thousands with a few loaves of bread. He trusts God to protect him all the way to the cross. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Yet he does these things on God's terms and is faithful.

The temptation is always there to be something bigger than we are, perhaps because we fear above all else to be perceived as *ordinary*, and yet, if we can accept the love and grace of God, we can know we are valued in God's sight, and we can simply become the loving, caring beings that God created us to be. For, as is often said, we are not all called to do great things, but we can always do all things with great love.

*¹¹Be glad, you righteous, and rejoice in the Lord;
shout for joy, all who are true of heart.*

Our Lenten journeys can be about many things, but perhaps most important for us, our Lenten Journey is the journey that brings us back home, brings us back to our Genesis, our creation, our giftedness from God...may we embark on that journey with all our heart and all our mind and all our strength, and may it take us where we need to be taken, until at the last, it brings us to where we need to be – at home within ourselves and at home with God.

A blessed and holy Lent to you all.

Amen.

(Sermon notes in italics – Sundays and Seasons, Augsburg Fortress)