

Tempted  
Luke 4:1-13  
Colebrook Congregational Church  
February 21, 2016 / 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent

Today is the First Sunday of Lent, which started during the week on Ash Wednesday. This period of 40 days of solemnness and self-denial commemorates the 40 Days in the Wilderness that Jesus spent right after His baptism. Jesus entered the Wilderness, fasting and denying temptations, sparring with the Devil. And the first Sunday of it this year just happens to be on Valentine's Day.

Today's selection is paralleled in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. Here in Luke, it is a commentary on Jesus' ministry. Time and again, Jesus must have been tempted by people to authenticate His mission with a miraculous display of divine power. There were not cellphones back then to record a single display and then upload to YouTube for the world to see over and over. Everyone would want to see for themselves, but Jesus refused.

We start with Jesus being drawn by the Spirit into the Wilderness to be tempted by the Devil, a scene of spiritual battle. In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was a sporadic and temporary influx of divine energy, and Luke shares that view, describing Her as if She was doing something relatively uncommon. And the phrase "40 Days" is a Hebrew and Aramaic idiom for "a long time."

While in the Wilderness, Jesus fasted, which is the common way in all religions that one builds up their spiritual power. By denying oneself of earthly or human-made delights, we can increase our spiritualness, and that is why people sought out hermits or ascetics or the first Buddha, even; and why we celebrate the season of Lent by giving up something dear to ourselves.

The Devil then presents the three Temptations to Jesus. To ease his hunger by turning a stone into bread; to complete His mission more quickly without that pesky Crucifixion by instant world domination; and then to prove His importance by forcing God to send angels to keep Him safe. All of Jesus' responses are quotes from the Book of Deuteronomy, chapters 6-8.

To the bread, Jesus responds with a quote that means that humanity's most urgent needs are not physical in nature, and also that meeting those temporal needs are not even a part of His mission anyway!

At the time of Jesus, the Jewish people had been dominated by centuries. Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and now Romans. It was a popular belief that the Messiah would come and reverse that situation. But Jesus could see that if He did succumb to the Devil's temptation here, He would not be serving the Will of God, but that of the Devil, and He says as much to the Devil.

The last temptation, is also commemorated in Shakespeare's play, *The Merchant of Venice*, when Antonio says, "The devil can cite scripture for his purpose." The Devil challenges Jesus to toss Himself off a high point of the Temple complex, and therefore force God to send angels to save Him, and part of his attempt included quoting the Greek version of Psalm 91:11-12, which was part of the Unison Reading today! Jesus again quoted Deuteronomy, which forbids such challenges to God's good faith.

And with that, the Devil gave up on Jesus. For now.

So, we celebrate Lent by giving up something that is important to us, because of what Jesus went through in the Wilderness. Jesus did not eat and resisted temptations to make food appear, an easy feat for Him. So what we give up should be something that we would miss. The father of a friend always said that he is giving up carrots for Lent. Thing is, he doesn't like carrots. That doesn't count.

In the past, I have given up social media or video games, and while I still use both, my level of usage has greatly diminished, and I see that fundamental change of habits as a good thing! I have more time for more important things.

I remember back at Divinity School, Juliet and I would routinely go eat Indian, Thai, and Chinese every week, to the point of routine. One year for Lent, I gave up that routine. Juliet was upset. She teased and tempted me at every opportunity. She would keep calling me up to invite me to go to India

Palace, or would get take out from Ivy Wok and eat it in front of me. I even quoted Jesus at her, telling her, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" She wisely did not tell me what she gave up.

There was two Friday nights ago. My conference was canceled due to the weather, so I had made other plans. I was working on this service, while Skyping with friends from New Hampshire & Vermont having a party far away. I left to get dinner, and was driving down Smith Hill Road, and I was coming up on that field with the big boulder in the middle of it and I saw what I later learned was a granite house marker lying in the middle of the road. It looked like a bag at the time. And then about 50 yards down the road, I saw that some kind of accident had just happened. I slowed down and saw that a stub pole was taken out by a car and was blocking the road. I could also see that no one was injured.

It was dark, so I wasn't identified yet. I could just turn around and drive away. I had a plan, I had somewhere to go, and people were waiting for me. I felt that temptation to just not get involved and just drive away. It was also very cold!

Then there was last Monday night, I was working on the Lenten bookmarks when I heard the fire siren outside of the post office go off. The message from Litchfield County Dispatch announced a motor vehicle accident at the corner of Colebrook Road and Center Brook Road. I could see it from the Parsonage kitchen! That night was also really cold and icy, and it was both snowing and raining...and I did not have proper footwear for that sort of weather, so I had an easy excuse to stay inside.

And last Thursday night, the bitterly cold night, I had lost track of time doing a puzzle. It was 2am, I am tired, and taking a warm shower, when I heard the fire alarm go off again. Motor vehicle versus embankment, fence, tree, and shrubbery. I had already turned out earlier for a community aid call in Barkhamsted, and the shower was so warm.

But no. I am a volunteer and I made a commitment and it wouldn't be right to give in to that temptation. So I parked my car to block traffic, got out,

traded my overcoat for turn out gear, traded my knit skullcap for a helmet, and got to work. In this case, temptation was fought off by a sense of duty and honor, that a commitment was made, and so it had to be done.

Temptation is all around us. It is okay to be tempted, what matters is how we face temptations. We are all unique people and each have our own ways of coping or resisting, and what works for one person may not work for another person. Some people pray, some read Lenten devotionals, some people have great mental discipline. I knew someone once who would snap a rubber band on her wrist. Another friend exercises. I tend to prefer the out of sight out of mind, and oooo...distraction method. And that's alright. Each of these methods are as valid as any other. The important thing is that we are able to recognize temptations for what they are and that we know what works for each of us to resist them.

Please join me in the Spirit of Prayer.

O God, on this first Sunday of Lent, a season of repentance, of self-examination, and self-denial, waiting for the leading of your Holy Spirit into the temptations of Jesus, the forty days in the wilderness, where our lives are laid bare, and we come face to face with the things that tempt us, the lure of overindulgence. Please open us to your grace and mercy, Your love and provision, as we confront these temptations that try to run our world and our lives. We ask that You give us the same strength as Your Son that we may also throw off any insidious temptations.

Help us to save us from ourselves, and open us to the life with Your Holy Spirit—a life of faith, hope, and love. As we let Your Spirit lead us away from temptations, may we discover the goodness and fullness of life in Your kingdom of peace. May we find in Your presence a refuge, a dwelling place, a place of rest. Amen.

## Intercessory Prayer

[PAUSE]

O God, We give you thanks for all the blessings and gifts you have given us, for those you have led into our lives and for moving us into the lives of others. And we thank you for using us as instruments of your divine love for us all.

We pray for the forgiveness of sins known and unknown, for falling short of how we should be towards ourselves, towards our fellow humans, and to all of Your Creation. May we reassured of Your forgiveness, so we may try to do better and make amends as we move forward.

We pray for everyone who needs Your help. For those who are unwell or wounded in mind, body, or spirit. We pray to be of assistance if we can, and for all those who have dedicated their lives to helping others. We pray to bring comfort to the lonely, shelter to the exposed and vulnerable, and nourishment to the hungry. May you fortify us to better serve you through our service to our neighbors.

We pray for ourselves. We pray for Your guidance in all that we do, to live up to the standard Jesus set for us. We pray that we recognize your messengers and those You send to help us and redirect us for who they are, and that we show the wisdom to heed them. And we pray for the strength to resist the temptations in our daily lives and continue the Lenten sacrifices that we offer up to You.

We especially pray for:

Gracious God, we offer these prayers and all those of our hearts up to you, in Jesus' name, Amen.

### Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

91:1 You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust."

91:9 Because you have made the LORD your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone. You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot. Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name. When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them. With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation.

### Luke 4:1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.