

Lent 1C 6 March 2022

Deuteronomy 26:1-11 / Psalm 91 / Romans 10:8b-13 / Luke 4:1-13

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Every year the season of Lent begins with the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, and this year we hear Saint Luke's account. Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit into forty days of fasting on a mountain. And we know in the Bible that "forty" often represents the in-between period before a time of testing's finally resolved. It's forty days or years for Noah's flood, for Moses on Mount Sinai, the Israelites wandering in the wilderness, Jesus' appearance after Easter. And for us, forty days of Lent until Jesus' resurrection.

In this morning's gospel story, the devil's temptation comes right after Jesus' baptism, so we can appreciate how Jesus is described by Luke as being "full of the Holy Spirit." He's just received God's approval and learned who he is by hearing whose he is – God's beloved Son - so he's prepared for an unknown, difficult time.

The pilgrimage we are on during Lent, to return to God, to receive God's grace and to resist temptation, is one Jesus knows as well. It's a struggle Jesus shared. With the Holy Spirit to protect him, Jesus is able to withstand the devil's tempting offers of physical

nurturing, control, and certainty. Or to put it more succinctly, offers of bread, power, and safety.

Jesus has been fasting so he's famished, and the devil also tries to tempt him with the glory and power of the world's leaders, and the promise of rescue from this God who may not be enough to keep Jesus safe.

Now, I don't think the point of the story is the specific temptations, but rather the nature of temptation itself.

Sometimes we Christians can get stuck focused on things we shouldn't do instead of on the gift of our identity as children of God. And the devil seems to know this! Each of the temptations put in Jesus' way is meant to undercut Jesus' confidence in his relationship with God, to undermine Jesus' identity as a beloved child of God.

When the devil offers him bread Jesus responds by affirming his trust in God. And with the temptation to have the power of all the world's leaders Jesus remains sure that his allegiance is to the God who's given him his identity. Then the devil proposes that God isn't trustworthy, to get Jesus to test their relationship, but Jesus refuses.

All meant to undermine Jesus' confidence in God and in himself. Each time the devil tries to break down Jesus' belief that he's enough, that he's secure, that he's worthy of God's

love, Jesus comes right back with being one of God's children and with reaffirming his identity. Jesus not only has enough, and is enough, but is of infinite worth in God's eyes as well.

This is how the devil comes at us, too. Bread, power and safety, sure – but it could be lots of other things we're tempted with: how about youth, beauty and wealth; or confidence, fame and security? All these temptations seek to move our allegiance and trust away from God toward some kind of substitute.

Which makes this a story about identity theft – how the devil fails to steal Jesus' identity, and the ways the devil tries to rob us of our identity as children of God.

We hear tempting messages every day that try and draw our allegiance away from God toward a second-class substitute. Advertising often is designed to create a sense of lack and inadequacy, along with the implied promise that buying the advertised product is going to relieve our insecurity. Or listen to our politicians. Many of their messages create insecurity and fear - of terrorism, or immigrants, or corporations, or low wages, high taxes, rich people or poor people, depending on the candidate. But the message is often the same: you should be afraid because you're not enough – but if you elect me, *I'll* keep you safe.

Lent is a time we associate with focus on resisting evil, and it's an opportune time to recognize that, like Jesus, we live in a wilderness where evil is with us. Where the devil tries to chip away at our relationship with God, to create a brief moment of doubt, or a tiny question mark, that makes space for more mistrust.

So Lent can also be the time to remember that the God who created and redeemed us loves us more than anything. God loves us enough to send God's own Son to take on our life to suffer our struggles and wants, to be rejected the way we feel rejected, to die the way we will all die, all so that we know God is with us and for us, forever.

God raised Jesus from the dead so show that God's love is more powerful than all the hate in the world. That the life God offers us is more powerful even than death.

And these gifts are given to each of us in our baptism.

On this first Sunday in Lent I invite you to mark a cross on your foreheads, right now, where you may have had ashes imposed a few days ago, and as you do it, say out loud "I am God's beloved child."

Remembering this may be why we come together each week, to be reminded of and given again our identity as beloved children of God. We're tempted in so many ways to lose

faith in God and confidence in ourselves. The devil may try and distract us with money, or numbness, with food or possessions, so that we'll question or forget our true identity.

But Jesus is with us in all our times of testing. And our baptismal creed that's renewed at Lent is a celebration of God's bountiful gifts to us.

Here at Saint Andrew's our identity is reinforced and restored, so that we may live confident in God's abundant love. And we're able to share that love with those around us! Each time we proclaim Christ to the world, we also remember we ourselves are beloved children of God.

The Lenten season of self-denial, sacrifice and resisting temptation can also be the season of reminding ourselves of the love and grace of God poured out for us on the cross. So that we enter Lent with our eyes focused on that beloved, heartbreaking image, where oh so clearly we see made manifest God's love for us and for all the world.

Amen.