

Did God Really Say?

Texts: Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Romans 10:8b-13 (Series C. First Sunday in Lent) Ps.91:1-2, 9-16

Luke 4:1-13

Let us pray”

Lead us, O God, to streams of Living Water. Speak in this place, in the calming of our minds and the longing of our hearts, by the words of my lips and in the thoughts we form. Bring us freshness, new growth and vitality, that we may be fruitful for thee, our rock and our redeemer.
Amen.

During baptism the question is ask. *"Do you renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways?"* Most likely, our parents and godparents answered on our behalf with a firm "Yes, I do." Many of us were asked that same question on the day of our confirmation and as we confessed our faith in front of the whole congregation, we once again said confidently, *"Yes, I do reject the devil and everything he does, so that I will no longer be led by him."*

When God promised to be our constant companion through life, and when we responded with our own words of loyalty and trust in God, we promised that we would not fall victim to Satan's tricks. How successful have we been in carrying out what we promised?

Are you feeling as guilty, as I am, because we know that too easily and too often, we have been led by Satan into all kinds of things that we know are not what God wants us to do? We can all relate to giving in to temptation. In fact, temptation forms a part of almost everyday life as we give in and do or say things that we know is not the right thing to do.

Paul's Letter to the Romans is about taking sides. About putting God first in our lives. About declaring our loyalties. I want us to look primarily at the gospel reading today. At the temptation story - and try to understand a bit of what it is all about. At first glance the temptations of Jesus seem strange. They seem so unlike our temptations, *to take things, to use people, and to ignore God.* Very odd to say the least.

Make bread out of stones? Leap from the temple? Worship Satan to gain the world? We can't really relate to these kinds of temptations as to the temptations that we experience.

Yet the temptations of Jesus are ours for Satan is with us as he was with Jesus; he is with us not so much to get us to do wrong things - we need no help in that department – but Satan's objective is to develop in us life destroying *attitudes* and *beliefs*; to develop in us those things that will take us further and further away from God's love.

Till one day we discover that we have no faith at all, that we are people without *hope* and without *purpose*, that we are – in short - completely lost - living only for today, living only for ourselves.

As a teacher of mine put it this way: Satan is interested in what we think; in what we believe about ourselves, and God. Look at Satan. What is he saying in the temptation story that we heard today?

- "If you are the Son of God ... change these stones into bread.....If you are ...
- If you really, think you are -- then can you not prove your power through a self-serving miracle?
- If you are really loved by God, can you not prove God's care by leaping from the temple?
- If you really want to change / save the world - if that is your mission - can you not do it better in the way that I show you? If you are the child of God, then why can't you, why don't you..."Think about that voice for a minute.

The voice Jesus heard as he wandered through the wilderness that we so often walk through in our lives – the wilderness not of sand, rock, and bush - but the wilderness of the souls....

The wilderness of a world that does not care - of a world that does not provide anyone an easy time of things - but rather is coldly indifferent if not openly hostile to us and to what we want and what we feel.

How often have you and I heard the kind of words in ourselves that Jesus heard at the end of his forty days of wandering - that voice speaking inside our minds and hearts - whispering quietly - but persistently:

- "If you really are a child of God, would you act that way"
- "If you are really are a child of God - would you not be able to overcome your weaknesses, do the good you intended, straighten yourself out?"
- "If God loved really loved you, would God treat you this way! Would God let you suffer?"

"Did God really say? You shouldn't eat that fruit? Is God really there for you? For anybody?" "Isn't there an easier a better way? Better than this. Better than now?" The voice of Satan is the voice of *doubt* and *discredit*, that doubt takes two major forms

- doubt in the goodness of God
- and what is commonly called "*self-doubt*", that doubt that questions who we are, and what we are about – the credibility of God, not for the purpose of improving ourselves or causing us to turn to God, but for the purpose of *tearing* down whatever good that may have been built up in us and causing us to wonder if there is any point in our continuing to live, or in trying to be faithful.

One of the biggest occasions of doubt that arises in the life of believers is related to the reality of temptation - and to the fact that we all too often succumb to it. I think we all know the feeling.

We pray less. We promise God that we will not be so impatient with the annoying people in our life and we find ourselves later, yelling at one of them with more vigour than ever before. Temptation is a human weakness and even with the best of intentions, we all – more often than we'd like to admit – fall or fail miserably.

The readings for this week give chapter and verse on how God hears us, shelters us, and saves us if we but turn toward the Lord our God. The literal translation of "repent" from the Greek is, at its basic level, to turn away from sin by *turning toward* God.

These 40 days bring us the time to reconcile our earthly wants with our eternal souls. We are to clean out our spiritual closets and blow the dust off hidden temptations, overindulgence, and the shallow distractions that distance us from Christ. It's time to turn the light on what we hide from ourselves and re-awaken to the call of salvation.

I propose to each one of us, over these forty days, to worry less about what to “*give up*” and concentrate more on what to “*take on*” to discover what will turn us back toward our Risen Lord and Savior.

Keep *the word near you, on your lips and in your heart* as Paul tells us. Prayer is a starting place even if only “What, How, Where Do I Start?” Jesus gave 40 days and 40 nights to his spiritual growth and strength for beginning of his earthly time.

Can you give 40 minutes? Put the phone, the tablet, the computer, social media, online shopping, the tv remote, etc., down for 40 minutes and take on a definitive, intentional, conscious turn toward the Lord by thought and by action, by desire, and most importantly by faith issues such as given yourself time. On Sunday to worship and hear a sermon?

Each of us is called to be obedient, to push and exercise our faith and to trust in God's wisdom. Indeed, often it is part of God's plan for us - that same plan that led the Spirit driving Jesus out into the wilderness where he was tempted.

Temptation is not a sign that we are lost, that we are beyond hope, when we succumb to temptation and do those things we ought not to do and fail to do those things we ought. If that were so, it would mean that the cross of Christ was to no avail and that his sacrifice on our behalf means nothing?

For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.” What could be more important for those of us who call ourselves Christian? Here's an opening just from the Psalm for this week: *You are my refuge and my stronghold, my God in whom I put my trust.*

Got 40 minutes? My final thought: When God wanted to create fish, God spoke to the sea, to create trees, He spoke to the earth. But when God wanted to create human God turned to Himself, God said in Genesis 1:26: *"Let us make human in our image and likeness."*

If you take a fish out of water it will die, and when you uproot a tree from the soil it will also die. Likewise, when man is disconnected from God he dies. God is our natural environment we were created to live in his presence. We have to be connected to him, because it is only in him that life exists.

Lent calls us stay connected to God, let us remember that water without fish is still water, but fish without water is *nothing*. The soil without a tree is still soil, but a tree without soil is *nothing*. God without human is still God, but human without God is *nothing*. We have content, that will help you and I become 1% better each day.

As we journey through Lent these forty days, we invite the *Holy Spirit* to enlighten the eyes of our hearts that we may turn toward the light of God in Jesus and be *birthed again*, and again, and again *from above*. As we seek, often, to *know what is the hope that God calls us*, placing our *hope* in Jesus, our Christ, is our first step.

Do not give up faith in God because of the temptations we feel - nor because of the ones we give in too - but instead we get up on our feet, turn afresh to God, and begin walking once again, remembering the word that God has given us the word of faith that says simply and clearly.

"if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

And the devil can nothing about it. Amen.