

Matthew 4:1-11 Lent 1
March 1, 2020

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, temptation. Temptation is a big deal during Lent.

If any of you have given up anything for Lent, I'm sure you've already been tempted. Well – if it's something you actually do or like. Giving up smoking if you do not smoke does not lead to temptation.

But, for me, I gave up my Nespresso coffee machine for Lent. You may be familiar with it from the George Clooney commercials – and yes, it is that good. So good! Come over some time and I'll show you.

So, it is my habit to get up in the morning and make myself a cappuccino to start off my day. Ash Wednesday wasn't a real issue, b/c I left the house at 6:30am and was busy all day long. Thursday, however, was a different story. I wanted a cappuccino so bad. It sounded so good. I was definitely tempted to take the towel that I had put over my machine off and fire the thing up.

But, I didn't. I reminded myself that that temptation was a reminder for me to pray. Lead me not in to temptation. Or, deliver me from the time of trial.

Not that wanting coffee is really that big of a deal; it's not like getting the splendor of the kingdoms of the world or anything. But, it was a temptation, one that I easily could have given in to, but I didn't.

Minor temptations are good practice for major temptations. If we can get past wanting coffee, we can get past the temptation to steal or do something worse.

Plus, for each capsule I do not use, I have about 80 cents to give to Episcopal Relief, and that's good motivation. Helping a child in need is much more important than drinking a latte.

Today, all of our texts revolve around temptation – Adam and Eve's inability to resist temptation and Jesus' ability to resist temptation.

In Genesis, Eve is tempted to eat the fruit off of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, even though she “knew” better. She had been told that that tree leads to death, but she was convinced by the serpent that she wouldn't die and that she could be like God.

So, since it looked good, she went ahead and plucked the fruit and then shared it with her husband who also knew better. God, after all, had told him directly not to eat from the tree, and to try and prevent his wife from getting fruit off of that tree, he also told her if she even touched it she would die.

But, there they are eating the fruit, not dying, and only coming to the realization that they are naked. Now, the knowledge of being naked potentially could have been good news. Hey, we're naked, but God is totally taking care of us. Isn't that great?!

But, instead of rejoicing in being naked, they knew fear. So, the tree of knowledge is the tree of the knowledge of fear. Evil is fear, and they were afraid of what would happen to them, so they needed to protect themselves. So, they made loin clothes and hid in the trees.

Before they ate off of that tree, they were happy in the Garden and all was good. All along God had been protecting them and they were fine naked. But, once they knew they were naked they made armor, a physical barrier between themselves and God, and this led to death, because they were removed from the Garden which held the tree of life.

With their creation of their loin clothes, Adam and Eve brought sin into the world, because they took over God's job of caring for them. And, in so doing, they separated themselves from God.

When we believe that we have to do everything for ourselves, we stop trusting that God loves and cares for us. That's sin.

Fast forward a few thousand years and we have Jesus in the wilderness.

Right after his baptism, the Spirit whisks him away to be tempted. This is a good reminder that being a Christian doesn't mean life is easy. The devil, or liar, much like the serpent, will try and convince us to turn from God and to rely on our own abilities.

Has anyone seen the newest Ghostbusters with the women?

There is a great line in there. Leslie Jones from SNL, who plays Patty, says – "The devil is a liar!" as she smacks Melissa McCarthy's character, Abby, in order to get the ghost out of her.

The devil is a liar, and that's literally what devil, or diabolous, means.

The devil is a liar. The devil is made up of all of the lies that try to separate us from God.

So, in baptism and confirmation we are asked “Do you renounce the devil and all the forces that defy God? Do you renounce the powers of this world that rebel against God? Do you renounce the ways of sin that draw you from God?”

And three times we say – “I renounce them,” or I reject them. And then we go into the Apostle’s Creed, which is where we find our strength to renounce the liar as we remember that it is God who creates everything, that Jesus came in the flesh to restore our relationship with God, and that the Holy Spirit is with us always in the church, the fellowship of believers, in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection, and life everlasting.

With that in mind, we have nothing to fear. If God is for us, who can be against us? No one. But, the liar would have us believe otherwise so that we will sin, so that we will separate ourselves from our true power who is God – the one who loves us and promises to never leave us.

The good news is that Jesus Christ is the perfecter of our faith. He is the one who stands up for us and defends us. He is the tree of life and he will never fall for the devil’s lies, as he proves to us in today’s Gospel lesson.

The devil, the liar, wants Jesus to turn from the true power, God. But, Jesus will not do it. He will not turn stones into bread, because he has nothing to prove to the liar. He knows who he is.

He will not jump off of the temple, because, again, he knows who he is and he doesn’t have to prove himself to the liar. And there are no riches in the world that will ever make Jesus turn and worship lies, because he is the truth. He is God’s love personified.

And the truth is what God has proclaimed from the very beginning – we are very good. In other words, God delights in us. We are loved. We have been created, because God wants to be in a relationship with us.

Yes, we will screw up and at times we will believe the liar who puts us down, but Jesus sends the Holy Spirit with us to chase away those lies by forgiving us. He is constantly restoring our relationship with God.

Any time we are feeling self-destructive, it is because we are believing the lies of the devil instead of the truth from God. And the truth is that we are beloved children of God.

So, when we want to just throw in the towel and give up, and just be like the “rest of the world” by lying, cheating, and stealing, we just need to look at the cross and know the truth. We are to die for. That’s how much we are loved. God gives up everything to be in relationship with us.

So, we can stand up to the devil and all of the empty promises and lies when we remember who we are, and whose we are. Just like Jesus in the wilderness, there is power in knowing who we are – beloved children of God, marked with the cross of Christ forever.

And so, during Lent, we do things to remind ourselves of our true identity so that it becomes easier and easier for us to resist the lies that would separate us from God. We fast from certain things, we give to the needy, we pray, worship, and read the Bible all so that we can be strengthened in faith.

For 40 days, we remember how Jesus was tempted in the wilderness after his 40 days of fasting. We remember that when he was at his weakest, he was still stronger than the lies of this world who try to separate us from God’s love. For 40 days, we remember that we are God’s beloved.

Lent is our focused time of spiritual growth so that we can face the other 326 days of the year this year in the confidence of God’s unending love, because his act of righteousness on the cross has led to justification and life for all of us, and all of creation.

It’s the good news we need to hear every day, and it’s the good news the entire world needs to hear as well.

We are beloved children of God. That is our power and strengthen, which enable us to resist the temptations of the liar.

Thanks be to God. Amen.