

Battling the Tempter

Rev. Taek Kim

Scripture Reading: Matthew 4:1-11

4:¹ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³ The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” ⁴ But he answered, “It is written,

‘One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ saying 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.’”

⁷ Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹ and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

‘Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.’”

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

We are journeying with God through this season of Lent, drawing closer to God through the power and presence of God’s Holy Spirit and our Good Lord and Shepherd Jesus Christ. Not only do we begin with prayer, worship, reading the Bible, self-examination, repentance, acceptance of forgiveness, and maybe you’re sacrificing something during the 40 days of Lent. Maybe you’re giving something up in order to be able to offer more of something to God and others, whether it’s time, service, resources, or something else which could include more time through some act of care on behalf of someone else. My family and I have given up things not only to get away from things that distract like technology, but we are intentional about how we can give as God would have us to with the extra time we have made available by such small sacrifices. I have even been more intentional about what I don’t need so that I am able to give for the needs of others.

Sometimes we choose to do this ourselves, and not only during Lent. Sometimes we see others doing something that moves us to do likewise. Among the various reasons why we would decide to be about the spiritual practice of living with less so that we can give more, not only on

occasion but as a way of living as a disciple of Christ, we no doubt can feel led by God to such acts of loving sacrifice.

Have you ever felt like God was moving or leading you to do something that you would not typically do? There may have been times when you did something and you found you really needed it, others truly needed it, and possibly much more when you looked back at how things had come together. There are times when you cannot deny the power and presence of God, seeing God's handiwork so much better with hindsight. Not only does your faith grow in such moments, but also your willingness to take more steps of faith when it seems challenging.

Well, have you ever felt the opposite when it came to outcomes when following God's lead? In fact, you may even felt beat up and even defeated? And when you look back you feel as though you can read similar signs and say you'll never follow in those steps in the future to avoid such tough times.

Of course, we've experience times that not only taught us lessons so we would be better able to avoid such bad experiences and troubles. However, there are times when God leads us in paths that will be challenging, difficult, turbulent, and even painful. Surely we wonder at times why God would do this to us. There are times when we actually are allowed to discover or understand why. There are other times when we have absolutely no idea and, regardless of understanding, learning to trust in God, even more at times.

So how do we handle the times we feel led by God to a certain time, place or situation where we feel led into temptation? Remember we pray the Lord's Prayer every week, and some of us say it more often. And within that prayer Jesus taught us we say, "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." We know God does not tempt us. James 1:13 clearly tells us that. However, we God can and does lead us in life which at times can lead us in to places and times when the tempter will know it's most opportune to tempt us.

Just as we have steps in place when it comes to certain things in life, whether they are part of the regular routine, special occasions, for emergencies, or something else when we can be prepared to can handle situations better, especially when life gets busier, more stressful, or emptier or confusing, we can also be better prepared when we are led into places that are like a wilderness and dessert place where the tempter can try and tempt us to fill desires, hungers, wants, and even things we didn't want before.

So, let's dive deeper into the life of Jesus at this particular time as we learn from Jesus's experience how to battle the tempter.

In today's Scripture reading, we do get an inside view of what was happening. And Jesus knew what was going on. It's always helpful to know that there's a spiritual battling going on when we feel that it's only an earthly or tangible battle we are facing.

First, it's hard to ignore, as I mentioned just a moment ago, that it was God the Holy Spirit that led Jesus into the desert and to fast. We must be aware and honest with ourselves that many times we are walking in the ways and towards the things we want more in life than it being God who is doing the leading. We no doubt are not Jesus, and we do not have that divine essence

and connection with the triune God. So, we won't be as aware and able as Jesus was all his earthly life, being able to be sinless so that he could be the perfect sacrifice for us on the cross.

Acknowledging that though we are filled with the Holy Spirit, that we are given spiritual abilities by God, and that we are able live and act with such power that comes from God as individuals and as the body of Christ, we are still more susceptible to temptation than Jesus. Let us not ever fool ourselves and think or feel we are ever beyond the tempter's schemes and ways. This helps us not have a false sense of security or confidence that is based more on ourselves than in Christ.

With that said, it helps quite a bit to know it is God who leads us in life. We are told in Proverbs 16:9 (paraphrased) that we plan in our hearts, but it is God who directs our steps. This does not mean we do not have our own will. Of course, we do. From the beginning of human existence, we know that God gave us free will, as Adam and Eve had when they were told in Genesis 2:6 that they could eat anything in the garden but the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Talking about temptations and battling the tempter, it is so tempting when we see so much pain, suffering and death in the world and our human history to wish God didn't give us free will and the ability to choose that which is sinful. On the other hand, I definitely have thought of how terrible it would be if we didn't have free will. It's a strange thought to think someone likes or loves you, not because they truly and genuinely want to but rather because they were made or controlled in ways that forced them to like or love you. My humor comes out more when thinking of this, with Valentine's Day having just past last week, with thoughts of me giving a Valentine's Card to my wife, Jamie, and it reading all the wonderful things of why I love her, but then ending with something like, "Well, you know I've said how much I love you because I do not have any choice in the matter." Oh, my goodness! How ridiculous when I put it in that way.

Without going too deep into free will, let us acknowledge that understanding we have been given the gift of free will, yet not without God being in ultimate control of the overall story. Therefore, we can make plans, live life, and do much of what we please. At the same time, God is the author of life, of the overall story, and of how things will end and begin again.

When we feel as though we've walked into a place of wilderness to be tested and even tempted, remember Christ was led by the Spirit for a purpose. That will help us because we know we are not alone and that we can learn from Christ how to do battle with the tempter. What helps us tremendously go through such time is knowing Christ is with us, that there are times when God leads us in places and times that we wish we weren't in, and though we have the ability to do what we want that God is holding us secure in life and will even after this life is over.

With such assurance that allows us to battle and persevere, we can confidently employ what we learn from Jesus as he was tempted. Jesus fasted for 40 days and nights. Can you think of the last time you went without food for a good length of time? Was it by choice or some health or medical reason? And for how long? Unless you're used to fasting on occasions and even for

several days or even longer, this is not easy or even recommended spiritual practice if you have any health reasons that would make fasting harmful.

If the fasting period is short, then reintroducing food is not much of an issue. But if it's a longer period of time, then care must be taken to gently reintroduce food back to your body.

With that said, whether you've fasted or not, we all can relate to being hungry. Sometimes we say without really thinking that we're starving as an expression of how hungry we feel. So after 40 days of fasting, Jesus was literally starving. Though we may remember or realize that we are often times being tempted in life, Jesus knew what the purpose of his 40-day journey in the wilderness and to fast was all about.

As soon as Jesus was finished with first major spiritual leg of his preparation, the devil pounced. Notice I said spiritual preparation. Jesus taking time to be alone in the wilderness was to prepare with pushing away the things that would distract so he could draw closer to God the Father and God the Holy Spirit; to pray; to center; and among other things to fast. Our spiritual acts of taking time away from things that can consume or distract us helps us prepare by focusing on who and what are most important. We are strengthened in remembering who it is we love and serve, why we do what we do, and how to fight the tempter, even when we are feeling the weakest or most vulnerable.

2 Corinthians 12:10 reminds us that when we are weak, in Christ we are strong. It is the grace and power of God that helps and sustains us when we are weak and when the attacks seem to be too strong for us to handle.

We may be tempted to go about in the wrong ways to get what we actually need or should have or there is nothing wrong with getting. In Jesus' case, there was nothing wrong with wanting to eat after 40 days of fasting. And even if he used his powers to make some food, there wouldn't be anything wrong with that. Remember he fed thousands with just a few pieces of bread and fish. Among the things that was wrong about this tempting situation was that it was of God's will but rather the devil's will for Jesus to use his powers to turn stone into bread. The battle wasn't about meeting a need, but in who it is Jesus' was following in order to meet the need. In addition to that, Jesus quotes Scripture to point out that he did not have to prove to the devil that he was the Son of God.

How many times have people fallen into temptation to prove who they are, who they thought they were, or who they wanted others to believe about them, whether true or not, and abuse their powers to do so?

How many times have problems come out of someone wanting to prove something out of pride, masked as needs having to be met, that not only affect the person's life and integrity, but that of those around the person?

Jesus would not fall into the trap the devil setup. Understand that the tempter is the one who is near perfect at his job. He tempted Adam and Eve, Cain, and so many throughout history, and continue to wreak havoc in the lives of individuals, families, communities, institutions, churches, nations and the entire world. And when it comes to needs and desires, and when

there are actual needs to be met, it's tempting to say who cares about the means to which the ends are met.

We can follow in Christ's footsteps when it comes to being tempted when we are hungry for something, incredibly hungry, even mentally, emotionally, and spiritually starving for something, by being prepared for battles with the tempter, to know we'll be hit hard when we are at our lowest or most vulnerable place, to remember God is always with us to help us and give us strength when we are weak, and to stand up firmly to the tempter and use the truth to defeat the lies and shed light upon the partial truths that could make us stumble and fall. Using God's Word is incredibly powerful. Even when the devil uses Scripture to try and persuade Jesus to jump to prove that he was the Son of God, and saying how the angels would protect Jesus from harm, Jesus uses Scripture to combat the misuse of Scripture.

The tempter wanted Jesus to prove his divinity, his power, as well as his chosen limitedness. Jesus chose to become human, being fully God and human, and thus submitting to most all human rules that came with being born, raised as a child, growing up and being able to responsibly leave his parents and family to begin his ministry and to fulfill his ultimate purpose.

Interesting that we find that it seems the devil has dominion on earth. I say seems because the devil makes it seem like he has the ownership and ability to give to others the power of all the kingdoms of the earth. I actually would have like for Jesus to first say something about the devil not having the control or ability to give control to others over such kingdoms. Rather, Jesus tells Satan to get away from him, emphasizing that it is God who is to only be worshipped.

We cannot ignore how Jesus responded to Satan. First two times Jesus simply responded with Scripture and wouldn't be budged one bit. The third time Jesus is quite annoyed. My humorous side can't help but think Jesus is ready to go grab a bite and is done with this battle, which for Jesus was more like a game, with the tempter.

We too can tell Satan to get away from us when we feel tempted and so frustrated by being bothered over and over again. That of course does not mean we won't be tempted again. In fact, in Luke's account of Jesus' temptation, in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 4, verse 13, we are told that Satan left Jesus until an opportune time.

I add the statement of Luke so we are aware that even with Jesus the tempter wasn't going to stop. Knowing this about our spiritual walk and battles helps us be better prepared whenever we face temptations.

Battling the tempter is surely not something we want to go through in life. Unfortunately, this is part of our walk in life. Thanks be to God that we are given many ways to fight well, especially in being able to see and learn from how Jesus handled and battled Satan's temptations.

When at times you feel beaten up after being tempted, whether you've overcome or at times have not, take assurance of a few things. One is that just as Jesus needed and received such loving care from the ministering angels of God, we too can and will find such loving care from

God by the Holy Spirit, by Jesus Christ, and our fellow disciples of Christ, and even angels that we may be aware of or not.

I pray you will walk closely and closer to Christ during this season of Lent. Take time to read about, meditate on, and draw deeper into the life of Christ, walking with him as we remember his life, his love, his sacrifice, his resurrection, and his call to each of us as his beloved children and disciples. Amen.

This Week's Praises and Prayer Requests:

Rebekah Kim's birthday falls on this Sunday, February 21st. Do look at our church's newsletter and take a moment to celebrate our church members' birthdays by a simple phone call, text, card, or other way to let them know we thank God for them.

Pray for Kathy LaFlure asks for prayers for Roger Binkley, grandfather of son-in-law Shane. Roger (81) has been hospitalized for a lingering cough.

Announcement from the Staff Pastor Relations Committee:

Dear Members and Friends of the Carleton United Methodist Church,



As Chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee, I wish to announce to you the appointment of Rev. Cloud Poy, our new pastor effective July 1, 2021. Rev. Cloud Poy was introduced to our Staff Parish Relations Committee by our District Superintendent, Rev. LuAnn Rourke, on behalf of Bishop David Bard, who set this new appointment. We are excited about the spirit, gifts, and abilities that Rev. Cloud Poy will be bringing to our congregation.

Rev. Cloud is married, and her name is Lisa. Rev. Cloud Poy comes to us from the northern part of Michigan. For the past six years he has spread God's word and love in three small churches in the Boyne City area. We will be planning a warm welcome for Rev. Cloud and Lisa Poy after their arrival in July, when we will begin our shared ministry under his leadership. In the meantime, of course, we will also be celebrating the ministry of Rev. Taek Kim, to thank him for his years of faithful service as we pray God's blessing upon his future. We are so pleased to make this announcement to you, and know that you will enjoy meeting Rev. Cloud Poy and his wife Lisa. Please hold them in prayer during these months of transition. Pray, too, for the whole Cabinet, including Bishop David Bard, as they continue to meet, pray, and discern God's will in the appointment-making process.

Trusting God's amazing grace, Christ's faithful love, and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit as we move into the future.

Serving Christ with you,
Earl Heiss

Staff Parish Relations Committee Chair
Carleton United Methodist Church