

022623 Matthew 4:1-11 "Led up by the Holy Spirit"

As we start our journey through Lent, today's Bible verses tell us about the three temptations Jesus faced in the wilderness after fasting for 40 days and 40 nights. Lent is traditionally a time of fast, penance, almsgiving. The idea most of us were given about Lent is that it is a time to give up something. And at the same time, Lent is a time of doing something to change our lives and the world around us. We often thought of Lent as a sad or sorrowful, or gloomy time of the year. However, when we are able to rediscover ourselves and turn back to God, it must be a time of joy and hope.

On one occasion Michelangelo, the great artist, turned on his fellow artists in a spirit of indignation. He said: "Why do you keep filling gallery after gallery with endless pictures on the one theme of Christ in weakness, Christ on the Cross, and most of all, Christ hanging dead? Why do you concentrate on the passing episode as if it were the last work, as if the curtain dropped on Him with disaster and defeat? That dreadful scene lasted...a few hours. But to the unending eternity, Christ is alive; the stone has been rolled away and He rules and reigns and triumphs!"

There is enough sadness and gloom in our world. It is a time to be refreshed and strengthened through faith. We are called to invite Jesus into the deserts of our lives. Throughout the Bible, the wilderness represents a place to prepare, a place to wait for God's next move, and a place to learn to trust in God's mercy. For 40 days and nights, Jesus stayed in the wilderness without food, preparing for what comes next.

How might you grow in faith and draw near to Jesus through the 40 days of Lent? Let Jesus' three responses to the devil be your guide: (1) Jesus answered, "live by the Word of God (Matt. 4:4)." In short, study Scripture; (2) Jesus answered, "do not put God to the test (Matt. 4:7)." In short, seek reconciliation with God and others; and (3) Jesus answered, "worship the Lord your God (Matt. 4:10)." In short, be active and intentional about participating in the worship.

Living in this world, we think about what to eat every day. Literally every day! More often too much! In the society we live in today, it is easier to be tempted because there is too much to eat than there is nothing to eat. You think about how to eat healthier, think about how to eat less, think about how to eat more cheaply using various coupons, and think about how to eat more deliciously.

Sometimes we complain that we have gained weight even though we have not eaten much and only drank water. Our Lord is inviting us to read and learn, paying attention to God's Word as much as we think what to eat.

The second temptation was 'Jump down from the top of the temple.' This temptation tries to lead us down the path of thinking, if you jump from a high place and don't get hurt, you will gain popularity and attention. In today's world, Jesus would be an influencer with over a million followers. But Jesus said, "do not put God to the test." Rather, seek reconciliation with God and others. The Lord invites us to do what God pleases from what we want to do.

The third temptation was, 'Bow before me, and I will guarantee success while on earth!' To bow down here is not merely polite, but to regard some as their master whether it be power, fame, money, etc. In the NRSV version, it was expressed as "worship me". Worship power, worship fame, worship money! However, Jesus said, "worship the Lord your God."

For many, worshipping God is becoming less of a priority. But listen to what Jesus said in John 4:23-24. "But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.'" Our Lord invites us to restore worship to our God in the season of Lent.

The Bible refers to the devil as "king of this world" in John 12:31 or "god of the world" in 2 Corinthians 4:4. If you look at this, you see that the devil's authority in this world, until the final judgment, is somewhat but certain. The Devil, of course, is not standing in front of our eyes with horns. Then who will listen to it? Verse 8 says, "the devil took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor." "Worship me, then I'll give it to you." The devil dazzles people. There is a battle between good and evil in this world. Forever? No! Until the Second Coming of Jesus. So, before that happens, the devil will try to get people away from God.

The temptation given by the Devil to Jesus is this: to prove that Jesus is the Son of God by His own strength whether by making a stone into bread or jumping off a high tower and surviving! If he can't do either, then bow down to the devil and try to prove to others.

What was Jesus' answer to this devil's tests? "People do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only."

What do these answers say about Jesus? Jesus was thoroughly about putting the Heavenly Father first! He had the power to do whatever He wanted, but He put himself in the position of the one who was sent! Making bread out of stone is a piece of cake and Jesus can jump from the tallest building easily, but that's nothing to do with what God wants. It is irrelevant to what God sent Jesus to do. Jesus walked the path of the Cross one step at a time to save us from sins and death. I will close my sermon today by telling you a story.

When both Gloria and Bill Gaither were single and teaching in Alexandria Monroe High School in Alexandria, Indiana, they met and began to share ideas about songs. Gloria, the English major in college, would in later years become the predominant writer of the lyrics in their songs, while Bill's forte would be the musical settings.

In the late 1960s, while expecting their third child, the Gaithers were going through a rather traumatic time in their lives. Bill was recovering from a bout with mononucleosis. It was a special period of anxiety and mental anguish for Gloria. The thought of bringing another child into this world, with all of the "craziness," was taking its toll on her.

On New Year's Eve, she was sitting in their living room, in agony and fear. The educational system was being infiltrated with the God is dead idea, while drug abuse and racial tensions were increasing. Then suddenly, and quite unexpectedly, she was filled with a gentle, calming peace. It was as if her heavenly Father, like an attentive mother bending over her baby, saw his child and came to her rescue. The panic gave way to calmness and an assurance that only the Lord can impart. She was assured that the future would be just fine, left in God's hands.

Shortly after the baby was born, both Bill and Gloria remembered that the power of the blessed Holy Spirit seemed to come to their aid. Christ's resurrection, in all of its power and affirmation in their lives, revitalized their thinking. To Gloria, it was life conquering death in their daily activities. Joy once again dominated the fearful circumstances of the day.

Those events gave rise to one of the most famous Christian songs of our time, "Because He Lives." In this song, which begins, "God sent His son, they called Him Jesus," we are reminded that Christ came to this earth. And the purpose for His coming was that we might be able to **face tomorrow**, with all of the uncertainty that it brings. She also reminds us that God holds the future right in his hands and makes life worth living for all who trust in him.
"... because I live, ye shall live also." - John 14:19

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, during this season of Lent, first, read the Bible, second, seek reconciliation with God and others; and third, be active and intentional about participating in the worship. During these 40 days, we make an intentional journey deep within ourselves. And ask God's help and live a life led by the Holy Spirit. So, we are able to face tomorrow. Fairfield Grace, May God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you and your family, and your business, and your studies, and with the lives of your children. Amen.