

Lent 1  
Year C 2019

Luke 4:1-13

Come Holy Spirit, give life to my words.

In the name of God, creator, redeemer and giver of life.

Amen.

Here we are at the first Sunday of Lent already.

The beginning of the season in which we are called to reexamine our lives against the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Last Wednesday, Ash Wednesday,  
we gathered to let go of those things  
which have accumulated over the past year,  
distracting us from God's true desire for each of us  
to live into the being created by and for God.

We have been invited to engage in  
self-examination and repentance  
for the ways in which we have allowed things  
to come between us and God.

To examine the past year and to identify the ways  
in which we have strayed from lives lived  
which show forth God's desire for creation.

It is not any easy exercise  
to enter into the process of repentance  
with true and open hearts.

It's easy to pass over those things we know  
impede our hearts and minds from drawing near to God.

It's easy to pass over those things we know  
fall short of reflecting our participation in  
God's desire for creation.

It's an uncomfortable exercise  
to reflect on our own particular temptations  
which we have been unable to avoid.

To take honest stock of those things which keep us  
from living lives which show forth the love of God  
made known to us in Jesus the Christ  
and bestowed upon each of us in abundance.

And because God knows that true repentance is not easily nor lightly entered into, we begin Lent with the gospel passage of Jesus in the wilderness for forty days being tempted by the devil.

It is Jesus' own journey of overcoming his particular temptations which are set in front of him to distance him from God, from his call to live into the person of Jesus the Christ, Son of God.

The devil tempts Jesus for forty days we are told.

Knowing that Jesus "ate nothing at all" for forty days, the devil puts before him a sinister temptation – the taunt to Jesus to use his God given power to create a loaf of bread to feast upon.

How heinous an act this truly was.

To even speak of food in front of someone who has not eaten for forty days is bad enough but to tempt someone deliriously hungry by goading him with the knowledge that he could very easily provide food and feast if only he were to exercise his power.

The very power he does exercise later,  
time and again,  
for the purpose of providing out of God's abundance  
for those who doubt, those who are hungry.

But Jesus will not waver in his steadfast adherence  
against needlessly exercise the power he has been given  
just to show he can.

No Jesus will not waste himself on trivial temptations.

Realizing this temptation will not serve his agenda,  
the devil offers up his second temptation.

He shows Jesus the breadth and depth  
of all the kingdoms throughout the known world  
over which the devil claims he can exercise his power.

He tempts Jesus with the vision  
of all the glory and authority of these kingdoms  
if Jesus will just worship the devil.

Jesus again rebukes the devil  
and rejects the offer of power and glory  
which is not the devils to give.

The devil makes one last pitch with his third temptation to lure Jesus away from the closeness of God, from living into the being that God has created.

The devil whisks Jesus off to Jerusalem, sets him on the pinnacle of the temple and commands him to throw himself down to see if God will act to save Jesus.

Jesus rebukes the devil for the third time, refuses to stray from the true desire of God for the Son of God, and the devil departs.

Now these temptations are clearly not frivolous.

They are difficult in that they are posed at a time when Jesus is weakened by his desert sojourn and because they offer the ultimate temptation – the exercise of power for one's own benefit.

They are aimed at separating Jesus from God and each presents an opportunity for Jesus to deny his true being.

Acceptance of any one of these temptations could have resulted in a brief moment of relief but ultimately would have resulted in a wholesale denial of the true being of Jesus the Christ, Son of God.

And so here we are, almost to the end of the first week of this Lenten season, and I suspect many of us have started this season with a commitment to deny ourselves something that is difficult for us to do without.

Or that we perceive is difficult for us to forego.

But I ask you my brothers and sisters:

Is the temptation we have picked one we have picked in Lenten seasons in the past?

Is our temptation something that comes between us and God?

Is our temptation something that keeps us from living into the being God has created in love?

The being that God has created  
to show forth the Gospel of Christ?

You see, for me, it's not that much of a challenge  
to give up coffee or baked goods or some such thing,  
for 40 days.

Because I know that I'm just going to go right back to  
drinking coffee and eating baked goods.

Most likely on Easter morning or potentially  
even at the very first opportunity,  
the reception after the Easter Vigil.

If I'm honest with myself,  
that doesn't really seem to be in tune  
with the Gospel passage we hear today.

What I hear in today's gospel is  
that these temptations which were put in front of Jesus  
were truly difficult, temptations which,  
had he accepted them, would have forever changed his life.

To have accepted even one of those temptations  
would have changed forever Jesus the Christ, Son of God.

An acceptance of any one of the temptations would have resulted in a denial by Jesus of God's true desire for Jesus and all creation.

Jesus instead chose to stay true to the person he believed God had created him to be.

In fact, the very next verse in Luke states that:

“Jesus filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee.”

Jesus heads to Nazareth, teaching in synagogues as he goes, and finally arriving at the very synagogue he grew up in.

Jesus then reads from the scroll of Isaiah, proclaiming the very essence of God's desire for Jesus and all humanity:

.....to bring good news to the poor  
.....to proclaim release to the captives  
.....recovery of sight to the blind  
.....to free the oppressed

And as we know as we sit here today, these are words that the world does not want to hear.

So, what does this mean for us, individually,  
and as the community of St. Andrew's,  
here today, as we move through this Lenten season?

As I mused over what Lenten discipline  
I was going to take on this season,  
I decided the coffee and baked goods deal  
just wasn't the true intent  
considering the temptations put to Jesus  
and his response to the devil.

I chose a few things that I believe  
are things that have built up over time  
which do come between me and God  
and God's desire for me to live into  
the person created by a loving and merciful God.

The Creator of all that desires equality, mercy and justice for all.

Oh, and love, yes definitely more love.

You see, as I have continued to work alongside others to bring about the women's village it has come to my attention that I can be quick to dismiss the views of others who do not believe as I believe.

I have allowed myself to be quite dismissive because surely God would not expect me to be swayed by opposing opinions and to abandon my beliefs.

Well, that's a bit too easy isn't it?

I think the temptation I struggle with is to believe that I am more often in the right than others.

Perhaps more work is needed on my part to continue to honor those who stand on opposite sides of issues important to me and not to fall into the trap of demonizing.

That's quite a bit more difficult than the coffee/baked goods deal for me.

But I think it's one area that's easy for all of us to fall into.

It's hard to stand in the middle of conflict and not let go of our beliefs and yet not demonize others.

To not trust that God is at work in the midst of the conflict,  
that God is merciful,  
that God has provided all that we need to reveal the Good News.

As we move through this Lenten season and beyond,  
I urge us to forego the temptation to do what is easy,  
to diminish God's intention for all of us.

Instead, I pray that we will deeply engage in living lives which show forth God's desire for all creation.

That we will make decisions about our lives,  
individually and collectively,  
that cause us to lean in,  
to think critically about what  
we have seen through the life of Jesus that  
clarifies for us God's call to us.

Decisions about how we live our lives  
which keep us from grasping the temptation  
to use our power and privilege for our own benefit  
and not for the benefit of all.

In the weeks and months ahead,  
not just during the remainder of this Lenten season,  
I pray we are able to move beyond ourselves,  
to bypass the world's temptations,  
and to engage.

I leave you with the words of Walter Wink:

Praying is rattling God's cage  
and waking God up  
and setting God free  
and giving this famished God water  
and this starved God food  
and cutting the ropes off God's hands  
and the manacles off God's feet  
and washing the caked sweat from God's eyes  
and then watching God swell with life and vitality and energy  
and following God wherever God goes.