



Sunday, February 25, 2018

Hi. Happy Lent. Or can you say that? Maybe it's not always about happy. Although I don't know. Lent probably has it's moments. Especially when it starts out with valentine's day

At first glimpse, though, Lent is a little bit trying. We're supposed to give up something that makes us happy. Usually something like chocolate. Or cheese. Marilyn's going to take a shot at cheese. Don't know if I'll join her, but she does have a lot of influence around our household, so maybe nevermind the cheese. C

But in general I'm really not good at self denial. I tend to break right down and have to contend with failure, so I'm not going to promise on the cheese thing. Of course, maybe repeal will work as long as it's accompanied by replace. If we repeal the cheese, what will we replace it with? Something good I hope. Have to think about that.

Of course, most of the Lenten denial stuff is pretty trivial. O you don't think the chocolate thing is trivial. O O.K. But look, has any of us has had to go through what Jesus had to?! The Spirit led him out into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan! Whoa. That's pretty heavy.

Why did the Spirit lead Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan? That's not very nice is it? But Jesus doesn't complain. Out he

goes to contend with the devil, and he succeeds. Three for Jesus, zero for the bad guy. Let's take a look.

Presumably Jesus is beginning to get really hungry. He must have been out there a little while. Stones into bread. That would take care of the problem. But what he says to Satan is 'people don't live by bread alone.' We people need to be spiritually fed by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

I'm going to push that a little bit further. Even stones have their rights. The creation is not here to simply be manipulated by we humans for our short term convenience or pleasure. In the wilderness, Isaiah tells us that we're supposed to make a highway, a straight road for our God; and we are told that the wilderness itself is to become a garden, filled with blooming flowers, nice things to eat. But doesn't the wilderness itself have any rights?

To what degree are we supposed to fool with Mother Nature in a world of climate change and general environmental degradation. Should go getem business people be allowed to graze cattle in Myakka Park? Are developers O.K. to develop everything in sight?

Excuse me, but even the wilderness has it's rights to be what it is. And anyway, where would Satan tempt us, if not for the wilderness?

No you will object, Jesus does change things around. Look, he changes the bread into his very body. Yes he changes the bread and he changes us, but he doesn't do it by manipulation. He does it by entering in. He enters into the bread. He enters into us. And though it doesn't always look like we've been changed a lot, you know you are not the same when you leave church today as you were when you

came. Not if you've been paying attention.

Second time, throw yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple. Well that would be tempting. Have you ever imagined being able to fly. When I was a little boy, I used to dream of flying, like Harry Potter with his quidditch, only freer, up in the mountains, across the Rhine river in Germany where I did a lot of my growing up.

And how about those angels. They will bear you up lest you strike your foot upon a stone. I'd like to be born up by angels.

But is it really O.K. to make people protect you when you don't actually need it? Isn't it very vain to show off how great you are? Look, God's my Dad. He'll just fix everything. No, here again we need to respect the limits of creation.

We also aren't meant to put ourselves in trouble and be nothing but trouble to those who care about us. That kind of attention seeking is not very nice.

For the third temptation Satan offers what maybe he doesn't have to offer, or, the possibility is really scary given the state of the world these days, maybe he does. I mean, maybe the world really does belong to the evil one and he can give it to whoever. Well no maybe not, but it's at least a tug of war as far as I can tell.

Let's know who we belong to. We belong to God. God loves us, and we are his children. God offers what he delivers on: true love, things like joy, peace, patience, loving kindness, the gifts of the Spirit listed out in Paul's letters. We are God's and that's who we want to belong to because the other one really has nothing to offer.

So why did Satan lead us out into the wilderness which you and I catch a glimpse of here and there - in shenanigans at work, bad family relations. To tell the truth, the wilderness can pop up any old place. O we find ourselves where Satan wants us and tries to trip us up. Manipulate the world around us in phony, destructive ways, stroke our vanity, accept the phony offers of that trickster who never delivered anything good to any one.

And if we're like Jesus, and we are you know, the struggle we struggle will make us stronger and better, and in the clinch, you can bet that the Spirit will be right there. We will find God mighty to save. We will be victorious.

Never mind the cheese and chocolate, although, if I could lose a couple pounds this Lent?! Might be a good thing. Amen.