

After all the Clouds and cold of this last week, and in light of the Gospel Reading of Jesus' Temptations, I thought we should begin this sermon with The Temptations from the 1960s, via Whopi Goldberg:

I've got sunshine on a cloudy day... when it's cold outside, I've got the month of May... I guess you'd say "What can make me feel this way?" My God!

That is the assurance Jesus demonstrates!

All the World came out to meet John the Baptist, he was the man of the hour, the Vladimir Zolenski, the Leader of the Free World of his time. But when the Pharisees and Scribes came to listen, John challenged them "WHO WARNED YOU TO FLEE THE COMING WRATH, you incestuous brood of vipers?"

When Jesus came to be baptized, and as he came up out of the water, HEAVEN WAS TORN OPEN, Jesus heard GOD, claiming him as GOD's own Beloved Child, with whom GOD IS VERY PLEASED!

Then the Holy Spirit descended like a dove upon Jesus and led Jesus into the Wilderness where he prayed for Over a month.

Different from Old Western movies, with the Hero starving and dehydrated crawling across the desert; I believe the point of this setting, is that Jesus has been in Prayer for 40 days, after which he recognizes his hunger.

To understand JESUS' TEMPTATION, we must remember 3 other BIBLICAL EVENTS, we all have heard:

Jesus is in contrast to Moses and the Israelites in their 40 years in the wilderness.

For 40 years in the Wilderness, the people hungered & complained about all they did not possess, all they wanted and did not have. All the while, Moses was leading them to PRAY as God was trying to make them Children of God.

The focus of Jesus for these 40 days was TRUST & COMMUNICATION WITH GOD, not deprivation.

COMING THROUGH THE WATERS: JESUS BAPTISM, just like the parting of the Red Sea, was DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S CLAIM of TRUST and RELATIONSHIP.

Remember the first Temptation in **the Garden of Eden**. They could have anything they wanted EXCEPT they needed to ACCEPT & TRUST GOD's Word that they not eat from that one tree. IMPLICIT in JESUS' TEMPTATION is whether he will trust GOD, or be tempted to TRUST ONLY HIS DESIRES.

Third, all of Christianity, all of the GOSPELS, have as our Foundation that **JESUS WAS CRUCIFIED FOR US** and never giving up was RESURRECTED BY GOD.

These 40 Days for Jesus, FOR US in LENT, set up the greatest Temptation: GOOD FRIDAY & EASTER.

Understanding that, Matthew tells this story with a wonderful sense of subtlety.

GOD had just told Jesus, YOU ARE MY BELOVED SON WITH WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED!,

So the Tempter challenges "IF YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD, PROVE IT! change rocks into bread, throw yourself off the highest point and see if God will protect you, Worship EVIL and all the power of the world could be yours."

Matthew could have said Jesus recognized the Tempter for what he is, and dismiss him once and for all!

But for most of us, **TEMPTATION is not a "ONCE & DONE" kind of thing**. We may recognize temptation and dismiss it, then be tempted by something else. Matthew is trying to demonstrate that temptation is very real, but trusting completely in God, Jesus was able to not just say NO to TEMPTATION, but to say **YES to commitment to a TRUSTING RELATIONSHIP to GOD**.

The Rock Band Grateful Dead, used to have a song "**The Devil is a Friend of Mine!**" That is what Matthew is describing through Jesus, here. When you in wilderness, you accept companionship from anybody available. There are times when we meet some characters who do not have our best interests in mind,

but we try to befriend them, to care for the most unlikeable and bring them along. HOWEVER
when the Tempter pushes too far, Jesus makes no equivocation and says "BE GONE!"

OKAY, we have the implicit comparisons; we have the subtlety of the Tempter; POINT 3:

Advertising has made an important shift in recent years, I am not certain if it was a realization during COVID that Personal Endorsements by this celebrity or that one no longer mattered to us, but instead, the emphasis of commercials has become what will satisfy us, that this Shampoo will make us GORGEOUS, this SOUP will satiate our HUNGERS, this House or Car will SATISFY OUR EVERY DESIRE.

There is nothing new in this, **St. Augustine the Bishop of North Africa** in the 4th Century described that "EVERY HUMAN HEART HAS IN IT A RESTLESSNESS THAT **CAN ONLY BE SATISFIED WHEN WE REST IN GOD.**" **Welsh Poet George Herbert** described this "restlessness" Temptation as "**A PULLEY**" by which GOD continually pulls us back into relationship, needing/searching for what will satisfy.

While the 17th Century **French Philosopher Blaise Pascal** described that every human heart has a GOD-shaped HOLE in it, which we long to fill. Pascal understood this hole to Not be a Flaw in our Creation, but is **the Emptiness of our Soul**, that only God could fill, and yet we try everything else but GOD in searching.

When I was in my 30s and 40s, I thought we had the world by the tail. I was married to my College sweetheart, had two great kids, the finest education, repeated successes at work and in the community, owned a beautiful home we had made our own through sweat equity.

Temptation did not come in the form of a man with a pitchfork and horns...

Instead, there have been repeated occasions, when professionally, in personal endurance, in our family, when I have had to come to the realization that I could not DO IT ALL and NOT BY MYSELF.

There were circumstances far beyond my control, and I had to trust not only to trust those I love, those I know to be professionals, those in the church and community I knew to be my friends, but to trust GOD.

For me, they came in Africa when all of my plans and connections fell apart.

When hiking the Appalachian Trail and recognizing I was not physically prepared to do this.

When illness robbed us of normal abilities, and we had to trust doctors and nurses and each other.

When our closest family members died and we learned secrets we had not known.

When I lost my job without cause, and brokenness prevented being trusted to have another.

AT ALL OF THOSE OCCASIONS and a thousand more, the only one to turn to became GOD.

I cannot pretend to have everything all together, to be invincible, I do not believe we should trust any preacher or leader who believes they do. I am a man, a man who trusts GOD, and I invite you in this season of LENT to come along on the Journey.

This is a journey of TEMPTATIONS,

it is a JOURNEY that leads to DEATH,

it is also the most MEANINGFUL of journeys,

the most REAL,

and through the Journey we find REAL SALVATION, by TRUSTING GOD.