

Daily Devotional Guide

Monday – Read Matthew 4:1. The temptation of Jesus occurs immediately after his baptism. At Jesus' baptism his identity as the Son of God was confirmed. Jesus was charged with bringing humankind back to God. How was he to do this? Was he prepared? In order to answer these questions, the Spirit allowed Jesus to be tested in the wilderness. When God calls us to a great task, we are often put through a time of testing to prepare us for what God has planned. How has God tested you in the past? What were the fruits of that testing?

Tuesday – Jesus was wise. He realized he needed time alone with God to figure out his role as the messiah. He knew he would be alone in the wilderness, which was a barren wasteland between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. There he could work out his destiny in silence. So often we make the mistake of not making time to be alone with God. Imagine how many bad decisions and unhealthy life choices could be avoided by setting aside time to be alone with God.

Wednesday – Read Matthew 4:2-4. In the first temptation the devil goes right after Jesus' weakness – his hunger. Jesus was famished after fasting for forty days, so Jesus was tempted to turn stones into bread. There are two sides to this temptation. The first one was for Jesus to use his powers for selfish purposes. The second one was for Jesus to attract people by giving them material things. His scriptural response from Deuteronomy reminds all of us that true satisfaction can only come by being dependent upon God.

Thursday – Read Matthew 4:5-7. The devil tries a different angle with Jesus with the second temptation. He tempts Jesus to persuade people to follow him by being sensational. The devil wants Jesus to imagine the people who would flock to him if he simply showcased his powers by floating down from a high temple. The problem with basing ministry on sensationalism is that people will always demand something more sensational. What's more is that demanding signs and wonders is not faith. We must rely on God's power, but not play with it or put it to the test.

Friday – Read Matthew 4:8-11. The tempter tried one more time. This time the devil was more direct, and he hit Jesus at his most vulnerable place – his desire to save the world. The devil told Jesus that he could have the world if would just compromise with evil. William Barclay reminds us that we can never defeat evil by compromising with it. Jesus did not back down. He kept his standards and remained loyal to God and God's purpose for him. In the crucible of the wilderness, Jesus learned that the only way he could bring humankind back to God was through a cross.



PASADENA COMMUNITY CHURCH

a United Methodist Congregation

227 - 70th Street South ♦ St. Petersburg FL 33707
727-381-2499 email: pasadena@pccumc.org
www.pasadenacommunitychurch.org



~ When Trouble Finds You ~ Fatal Attractions: How to Resist Temptation

Sunday, March 27, 2011

Sermon by: Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor

Scripture Lesson: Matthew 4: 1-11

I once read about a TV executive who wanted to boost ratings, so he decided to issue a warning on one of his network's most popular shows. For a week he advertised his show with this warning: "Viewer Discretion Advised." When his colleague asked him what was different about this particular episode, he replied, "Nothing really. I just know that people will tune in to something they think they shouldn't be watching."

It is true what Oscar Wilde said: "The easiest way to get rid of temptation is to yield to it." And so it is.

There she is with her tax forms spread all over the dining room table. The kids are running around. She has struggled to make ends meet as a single parent. Temptation slithers in and says, "Go ahead. Cheat a little on your taxes. You deserve it. You have worked too hard for Uncle Sam to take more of your money."

His buddy sends him a link to a web-site. He knows it is one of those adult web sites and he pauses before he clicks on it. Temptation slithers in and says, "Oh, don't be such a prude. It is not going to hurt you. Most of your friends go to those sites anyway. You're just looking."

She has been sober for a year. Her old friends come into town and they all go out to dinner. They all order wine. Temptation slithers in and says, "Oh, go ahead, just have one. You don't want to disappoint the girls."

He is at a party with his friends. Some of his friends begin making racist jokes. He is

uncomfortable. He knows it is wrong. Temptation slithers in and says, "Oh, don't say anything. You want to fit in, don't you? Why don't you tell one of the jokes you know. They'll love it."

They have been working many late nights together. They both are married and have kids of their own, but they can't help but feel some attraction toward each other. Temptation slithers in and says, "Go ahead. Take her out to dinner. You have earned a good time together. It's only dinner."

Temptations are like belly buttons; we all have them. To not admit we are tempted to sin is to stick our heads into the sand. There is a spiritual battle going on inside each of us. We all have some sort of spiritual kryptonite that weakens us and threatens our faith. And the truth is our faith is strengthened or weakened by how we respond to temptation.

Adam and Eve

Adam and Eve understood the power of temptation. We all know the story. Most of us have heard it all of our lives. It is the ultimate story about our desire to have something that is forbidden, off-limits. Adam and Eve were in complete paradise. Their world was perfect. They never got sick. They never got upset. All their emotional, physical, and spiritual needs were met. All was right with them, with their God, and with their world. All they had to do was stay away from the tree in the middle of the garden. All they had to do was not eat from this tree and their perfect life would never end. This didn't seem too much

to ask.

But you know how it is – you always want what you are told you cannot have. Adam and Eve were curious about this tree – it was forbidden! I am sure they stared at it, dreamed about how the fruit tasted, fantasized about how it would make them feel. Here they were in paradise and they wanted the one thing God told them they could not have.

The Snake

Enter the snake. Now, I know the Bible says the snake was crafty, and I know the snake seems to be a good symbol for evil, but if I wanted to tempt somebody the last thing I would send is a talking snake! Most people I know avoid snakes at all costs. I do! I would send a friendly, cuddly dog or something. This serpent must have been one clever snake!

Well, the snake was crafty. If you are trying to coerce someone, you find an area that is vulnerable and you coil your way around it and squeeze. For Adam and Eve, it was pride. When Eve told the snake that they were supposed to stay away from the tree or they would die, the snake said, “No, you won’t die. Did God tell you that? He just doesn’t want you to have his knowledge. He just wants to keep you from more fun. He just wants you to stay in your place.” That’s all Adam and Eve needed. They fell into the trap and took a big bite out of the forbidden fruit.

Maybe that’s why temptation came in the form of a slithery snake. Snakes have a way of getting into the nooks and crannies. They have a way slithering their way undetected into places we thought they could never reach. Snakes have a way of finding the vulnerable places.

The Temptation of Jesus

Jesus understood the subtle power of temptation. There is this false notion that Jesus rose above temptation. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus was fully God, but he was also fully man. He battled the same temptations that every human being battles. But Jesus fought temptation and won. We see it in our text for today.

Jesus had just been baptized in the preceding passage. It was a high moment. God confirmed him as the Son of God. Suddenly, temptation. This is often how temptation works. It

comes right after a moment of high achievement when pride is strong and defenses are down. It is true. We have found that most ministers fail from the top, not from the bottom. Success is often more difficult to deal with than failure.

The tempter came to Jesus in the wilderness and said, “So, you are the Son of God. Well, you have great power now. Turn those stones into bread. You are hungry. Imagine the things you could provide for people with your magic powers. Imagine all the people who would follow you.”

The tempter came at Jesus again. “You’re the son of God now. Entertain the people by soaring down from heaven like Superman. They will be amazed and will follow you. Imagine how sensational you could be.”

Finally, the tempter said to Jesus, “I know you want to save the world. Well, I will give you the world. All you have to do is compromise with me a little. Wink at evil. Become a little more like the world and I will give you the world.”

Jesus resisted, and in the crucible of temptation he discovered the one thing that was his destiny as the Son of God – to bring the world back to God through sacrificial love. Nothing would deter Jesus from the cross. Love always wins.

Just as Jesus resisted temptation and won, so each of us can resist temptation and live a victorious life. We can if we do what Jesus did. This passage in Matthew gives us all we need to know to resist temptation.

Build Up Your Resistance to Temptation

Just like our bodies build up resistance to illness and disease, so our souls must build up resistance to temptation and sin. We build up this resistance from being nourished by the word of God. Did you notice how Jesus resisted temptation each time the tempter came at him? He quoted scripture! Each of his responses was from Deuteronomy. Since childhood Jesus had built up a resistance to temptation.

Many people are victims of temptation because they have not built up resistance with the word of God. When was the last time you spent 10 minutes reading the Bible? Is your soul weak and vulnerable to the temptations around you?

I like the old legend about the Cherokee Indian sitting with his grandson and telling him

about the two wolves that live inside every person. He said, “One wolf is bad and the other one is good. And they are fighting a battle inside every heart.” The little boy thought for a moment and then asked, “Which one wins?” The Indian replied, “The one you feed.”

Remember Who You Are

The tempter was very crafty with Jesus. He didn’t tempt Jesus with a chocolate cake or a girl in a bikini. He tempted Jesus with the power he had. He was tempting Jesus to misuse his power and identity for the wrong purposes. Jesus was able to resist because he remembered who he was. He knew at a deep level who God had called him to be.

Many are defeated by temptation because they forget who they are. They forget their values and drift away from their foundation. Life gets busy. There are deadlines. Other goals and ambitions come in. The call of the world gets louder.

There was a young couple who were very successful in their respective jobs. They wanted to move up the social ladder. They got busier at work. They stopped going to church largely because they started to throw parties at their home on the weekends. They were proud about all the important people who were coming to their house. One night a little too much wine was served and the jokes got a little raunchier and things got a little out of hand. The noise woke up their little daughter and she came down stairs in her night gown. She saw all of the plates and food and glasses. She said, “Oh, you are about to eat. Let me say the blessing. ‘God is great; God is good, let us thank him for our food. Amen.’” Some of the guests squirmed and said, “Well, it is getting late. I guess we ought to be getting home.” Later, as the couple was cleaning up the dishes, the wife looked at her husband and said, “What do we think we’re doing?”

Know What Is On the Other Side of Temptation

Jesus knew what was on the other side of temptation; lies and emptiness. The devil is a liar. Evil never provides what is promised. No matter how reasonable or good temptation sounds, it is always a mirage hiding complete darkness. One can never defeat evil by compromising with it.

I have never been to the greyhound dog races, but I have seen them on television. Here are

these beautiful dogs with long legs, bred for speed, chasing a mechanical rabbit around a track. These dogs run themselves ragged chasing this rabbit. Well, what is unfortunate is that when the dogs get to the point that they can no longer race, the owners take out ads in the newspapers to see if anybody wants to adopt one for a pet. You can have them for about 200 dollars; otherwise, if no one takes them, the dogs are put to sleep.

Fred Craddock once visited a home that had an adopted racing dog. He was a big, spotted greyhound, and he was lying in the den. One of the kids was pulling on its tail, and an older kid was resting his head on the dog’s stomach, using it for a pillow. The dog just seemed so happy. And, you know, Craddock looked down at the dog and said, “Are you still racing?”

The dog said, “No, no. I don’t race anymore.”

He said, “Do you miss the glitter and excitement of the track?” “No,” the dog replied.

“Well, what was the matter? Did you get too old to race?”

“No, I still had some race in me.”

“Well, what then? Did you not win?” he asked.

“I won over a million dollars for my owner.”

“Well, what was it? Bad treatment?”

“Oh no” the dog said, “they treated us royally when we were racing.”

“Did you get crippled?” “No.”

“Then why?” he said.

The dog said, “I quit.” “You quit?” “Yes,” the dog said. “I quit.”

“Why did you quit?” The dog said, “Well, I discovered that what I was chasing was not really a rabbit, and I quit.” The dog looked at him and said, “All that running and running and running and running and what was I chasing? It wasn’t even real.”

When you quit chasing those things that aren’t real, that are empty, you will find a Savior who has been chasing you. And, believe me, nothing is more real than the love he has for you. Amen.