

Sermon Lent 1B 2018: Lent is About What Jesus Has Done, Not Us

Introduction

Today is the first Sunday of the Season of Lent;

The first Sunday in the season of the Church year where we prepare ourselves;

For a closer walk with God and to welcome the joys of Easter;

Through a time of penitence and quiet wonder at the love of God.

Lent is a particularly good time in the Church year to examine our lives;

To look at our lives in general and our lives as Christians more specifically;

As we allow the Holy Spirit to show us areas in our lives

That are interfering with spiritual growth and the life with God.

Lent is a time for the Spirit to help us look at our blind spots;

At the habits and practices and attitudes

That keep us from God and then to be changed;

Not by our will or our might, but by the power of the Spirit of God.

For many of us, Lent is a time to take on some spiritual discipline;

To take on some practice or practices that will help us grow in faith;

We may choose to read the scripture daily;

Or to read and reflect on the Lenten meditations written by the parish;

We may set aside specific times for prayer in our days;

Or find new ways to give of ourselves for the good of others.

Lent is also a time to set aside some aspects of our lives that may be keeping us from God

A season of fasting from the habits and addictions that fill up our attention so much;

That there little or no room for God to make His presence and love known to us.

In Lent we give up or fast, not to show how strong we are

Or how self-disciplined we can be when we choose to;

But to open up our lives to make room for God and a greater life.

For some of us, like me,

Who is very much like a golden retriever or lab in my food interest, it's food;
And so, if you're like me, we may set aside some types of food;
To remember our Lord's forty days of fasting in the wilderness;
And to remember and pray for those who have less than we have.

Some of us may stop watching television altogether;

So that we can find some time for God and one another;
Some of us set aside thinking of ourselves first and only;
All in an effort to draw closer to God and God's call on our lives.

Lent is called a holy season, not because we somehow become saintly in 40 days;

Although by God's grace, you might;
But like all things that are holy, it's a season set apart;
To know and experience God more fully.

And in this holy time, we hope to come to a deeper understanding of Jesus' sacrifice

We hope to come to a deeper knowledge so that we may know in our hearts
That are sins, our real sins, are truly forgiven;
And so that we may live more fully in the promise of Jesus;
That this life is not all there is and we will live beyond the door of death
Because of Jesus' triumph over sin and death.

For when we know our need of salvation during Lent or any other time of the year;

Then we appreciate and are truly thankful for all that God has done and is doing for us;
And can live in God's presence and for God's purposes more and more.

Trying and Failing

This Lent, I have decided to go with the food thing again, fasting on Ash Wednesday;
Cutting our sugar and overeating, severely limiting my intake of adult beverages;
Listening for God more and looking for a healthier work-life balance.

So I woke up very early on Ash Wednesday to be with Sandy McCurdy
And the commuters at the Wayne train station for Ashes to Go by 6:30 a.m.;
I raced out of the house and on my way there, I picked up a cup of coffee;
We shared ashes and prayer with 47 people and now hungry;
I picked up a breakfast sandwich on the way back to church.

Wiping the crumbs off my face, I raced into the office, but on my way in;
I noticed that someone had brought in homemade Valentine's Day cookies;
And not wanting to be rude, I took one, it was delicious;
When I finished the cookie, I realized that I had blown my Ash Wednesday fast;
And was discouraged at my weakness.

I said a little prayer and realized that in my desire to get to the train station early;
I hadn't sat down for my morning prayers with God, hadn't cracked my Bible;
And hadn't even said hello to God until about 10 a.m.

I finally got home a little before 8 p.m. and only wanted to pick up an adult beverage
To sit down in front of the television to zone out on everything and everyone;
But was saved by my wonderful wife and had water and conversation instead.

As I lay in bed to drop off to sleep, I realized that I had blown or attempted to blow
Every one of my Lenten disciplines on the first day.

In the face of the temptation to hurry and the temptations to eat and to zone out with TV;
I wondered how I was going to keep a holy Lent at all with such a pitiful beginning.

And as I pondered my poor beginning toward holiness this Lent;
Something or someone deep inside me chuckled;
And something like a gentle voice from within me helped me to remember
That the season of Lent is not about me;
It's about Jesus.

The season of Lent is not about what you and I are doing to save ourselves
Or to make us righteous and holy before God by our little disciplines;
It's about Jesus and what He has done to save me and to save you.

Lent is about remembering what Jesus has done;
And the depths and the lengths to which God will go
To save the holy and the unholy simply because He loves us so.

The Gospel: Jesus Overcomes Temptation

In today's Gospel, Jesus is baptized and then driven into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit
And there, Satan test Him; And there, angels wait upon Him.

Mark doesn't give us the details of the three temptations that Matthew and Luke provide;
Or how the angels waited on Him specifically;
And though we do not know Mark's full intention of including the story;
Mark seems intent on establishing the pattern of Jesus' life and ministry
That continues beyond Jesus' time in the wilderness.

The temptations Jesus faces in the wilderness
Are the temptations He faces in His life and ministry;
Temptations about being less than the Messiah God has called Him to be;
Which turns out not to be about power as we think of power;
But a call to take on the power of evil and sin and death
By going to the cross to die.

So in the wilderness as well as in His ministry, Jesus refuses the temptation
To turn stones into bread or to do magical and miraculous feats
To merely draw attention to Himself;
Jesus is always pointing toward God and God's kingdom;
And so often when Jesus performs a miracle, he wants it kept quiet;
Because these individual healings and miracles are secondary
To the power and purpose of His death and resurrection.

Jesus refuses Satan's temptation in the wilderness and in His ministry to impress people;
To do something spectacular to gain followers, like jumping from the top of the temple;
Or to come down from the cross, if He is the Son of God;
And He refuses to perform miracles on demand for anyone.

Jesus refuses in the wilderness and in His life and ministry to worship or trust
In anyone or anything other than God and will not worship Satan or worldly power;
As a shortcut to success;
But takes the long, hard road and allows the evil and power of this world;
To nail Him to the cross to reveal and to stop the cycle of violence;
So that through His dying sacrifice, we might be saved.

In the wilderness and throughout Jesus' ministry, Jesus is tempted, but does not sin;
Jesus is tempted, but is faithful to God so that the magnificent power and love of God;
May break the hold of sin and death on our lives
So that we may be made new through the power of His death and resurrection;
Made new for life with God now and for life eternal.

Lent Revisited: Starting Over

The wonder of this God we follow and serve is that he forgives our sins;
And we can start over time and time again with a clean slate;
And not just the eating a cookie or watching TV sins;
But sins like our refusal to seek and follow God,
Hatred instead of love of our neighbors,
And all that we do that is self-centered.

And while you and I may struggle to keep our Lenten disciplines;
Or be Godly, loving people every day of our lives;
God is still here with us and God is ready to forgive.

The disciplines and activities we practice are really only the means at hand;
To help us pay better attention to God in our lives;

And to recall the sinlessness of our Lord in the face of real temptations
And the power that His cross and resurrection bring to our lives.

I'll continue to work on my disciplines of prayer and fasting and slowing down a bit;
And I hope you will keep or start your spiritual disciplines, too;
Because like Jesus in the wilderness, I expect the angels and the Holy Spirit;
To wait on us and to help us to a deeper relationship with God;
And a truer, more life-giving appreciation for Christ's death and resurrection.

My prayer for all of us this Lent

Is that we may be drawn closer to God as individuals;
And as this community of St. David's Church;
So that the Holy Spirit who drove Jesus into wilderness;
And stayed with Him there and throughout His life and ministry;
May be present with us in the wilderness of our lives;
And working in us the power of God's love.

Amen.