

Sermon Lent 1C 2022: Facing Up to Temptation, Becoming Children of God

Introduction: Knowing Temptation

Growing up in Texas and spending a lot of time at grandparents on the farm

Or near ranches, I developed a love of trucks and a desire to own one;

They were literally everywhere, so I thought having a truck was a good thing

May be why I've driven Jeeps for so many years, but they're not quite a truck.

About ten years ago, the desire to drive a truck began to grow;

And I started looking at old trucks, a 1951 Chevy short bed to be precise;

The kind you see on Christmas and greeting cards a lot.

Well, over my time away, I finally bought one – you'll see it soon;

It arrived three weeks ago from Georgia and I needed to get a PA title;

While at the tags place, the person working the desk

Asked me what it was worth to set the sales tax;

I knew what I had paid, but was tempted to tell her a lower number;

I didn't, but the temptation was there.

I was speaking recently with some parents of teenagers;

Who had been planning a long weekend as things began to open up in January;

Some place warm, but decided not to go

Because they'd have to leave their teenage children home alone

And with all the parties they'd heard about taking place when parents are out of town,

They felt like they couldn't place them under that kind of temptation.

Years ago when the Sports Illustrated swimsuit edition arrived at our house

It went directly into the paper recycling bin,

Much to the dismay of some of the male members of our household,

Interested solely in seeing what swimsuit styles might be this summer.

One of our sons asked me later, in private, if I was going to retrieve it from the recycling,

I don't know, I'm tempted, I said.

Most of us think that if there's one thing we know about in this life, it's temptation.

If there's one church word that doesn't need to be rescued for our modern ears;
One word that connects firmly and clearly to our everyday experience,
Temptation may be that one church word.

We face temptations all the time;

And in this season of Lent, when we've gone out of our way to give something up
Or to take something on to try to lead a more committed Christian life,
It almost feels like we're tempting temptation itself in Lent.

We're tempted to break our Lenten disciplines, to break our diets;

To cheat on our taxes, to gossip about a friend, to lie our way out of difficulties;
We're always being tempted to do what we shouldn't do,
We don't need any instruction about temptation,
Temptation we know. But do we really?

Thirty years ago, Robert Fulghum, had a best selling book entitled,

All I really need to know I learned in kindergarten

And in this very popular book, he argues that the deepest wisdom he knows
Came from the kindergarten classroom and the sandbox:
Wisdom like "sharing, playing fair, cleaning up your own mess;
Don't hit people, hold hands and stick together."¹

So, if Fulghum's theory about wisdom is correct,

Then maybe we should go back to Sunday School to learn what temptation really is.

Truthfully, I don't remember too many specifics about what I learned in Sunday School;

Beyond Jesus loves me, but I do remember most of the people who taught us;

And one of these teachers said something that has always stuck in my mind

¹ Robert Fulghum, *All I read Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten: Uncommon Thoughts on Common Things*, pp. 6,7.

And that is that the best measure of a person
Is what they would do if no one else were around;
Is what they would do if there was no one there to reward or to punish them.

It strikes me now that this is more conventional wisdom than Christian wisdom;
But it's pretty close,
Because we Christians believe that what we do in life as Christians;
Comes not from a sense of reward or a fear of punishment;
But out of who we understand ourselves to be.

In that light, we probably have too shallow a view of temptation.
In our minds we think temptation is the urge to do something
We would really like to do, but shouldn't do –
One more piece of cake, one more juicy rumor, one more Sunday morning in bed,
But the deepest level of temptation is not this urge to misbehave;
But the temptation to be less than who we are called to be the children of God.

Gospel: Jesus' Temptations, Our Temptations

That's the issue at stake in this Sunday's Gospel reading from Luke,
The devil is not tempting Jesus to misbehave.
He's not tempting Jesus to break his fast or steal a piece of candy
Or cheat on his taxes or pick a fight with his neighbor
It's much deeper than that.

The devil is tempting Jesus to deny who He is, tempting Jesus to forget His baptism;
Tempting Him to set aside the truth that He is the child of the Father in heaven,
Who has been sent to restore humankind through the cross.

You see, it's significant that Jesus is tempted, immediately after his baptism,
Right after the skies opened and the dove descends and the voice proclaims,
"You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased."

You are the one I am sending down the long, painful road to Jerusalem,
You are the one I am calling to drink the bitter cup of sacrifice;
You are the one who must endure the cross to receive the crown.

It is here, then, after His baptism, when Jesus' vocation and identity are most clear
That He is led by the Spirit to this time of tempting in the wilderness;
And it is Jesus' identity that the devil seeks to destroy;
That's what temptation is really about.

The devil tries to pick away at Jesus' understanding of who He is as God's SON,
Tempts Him to follow a different way than the way God has planned.

The three temptations; to turn stones into bread;
To throw himself down from the temple are not temptations to do bad things.

But to worship the devil and perform these acts as showy tricks to get people to believe;
Are, at their very core, the temptation for Jesus to be somebody else,
The temptation to live some life other than the life of the beloved son of God,
To deny who He has been called to be.

But Jesus remembers and Jesus knows who He is;
He remembers and knows and He trusts in God's plan of salvation,
The plan that will require Him to accept the cross to save the world;
And with every temptation of the devil, Jesus chooses God's way;
And remains who He is, the beloved Son of God.

Tempted to be less than children of God

Because you and I belong to Jesus by nature of our baptisms;
Because we have been called to be the children of God in the world;
We, too, have been given a life to live, a role to play;
A part in God's plan of salvation;
Christ's hands and feet and heart in the world today.

We who have been marked as Christ's own forever, marked as the children of God;
Have been called to bring peace where there is strife;
To put the good of others before ourselves;
Called to offer love in the presence of hatred;
Called to stir hope where there is despair, and to embrace faith where there is fear.

And because we have been called to this way of life, we are also tempted;
Tempted to live out another story; tempted to follow a different plan;
Tempted to be someone other than who God has called us to be.

In the midst of South Africa's struggle against apartheid and in the time of reconciliation
One of the most respected and well-known voices
For racial harmony and human dignity and love for neighbor
Was Bishop Desmond Tutu, who recently entered into glory.

Tutu went out of his way to practice Christian charity and forgiveness
With the very people who sent him to prison
And put his life and the lives of millions at risk.

But even some of Bishop Tutu's closest colleagues
Were distressed by his tolerance and moderation, by his Christian graciousness;
They wish that he had been more aggressive and stern with his opponents.

One of them said, "At his age, you'd think he would have learned to hate a little more;
But there is this problem with Tutu", he went on,
"Tutu believes literally in the Gospel
And so can make no other choice."²

What this critic was saying in effect was that Bishop Tutu remembered who he is;
Remembered his baptism, knows the Gospel story

² Tom Long, *Whispering the Lyrics*

And is unwilling to change the plan or to set aside his call as God's child,
Whatever it costs and whatever comes his way in life.

You see, to give in to real temptation is far more serious than misbehaving;
To give in to real temptation is to say, I am not a child of God,
I will not take my part in God's plan of salvation,
I will not seek to know God in Jesus Christ
And to make Christ known to others.

So in this season of Lent,
When many of us are paying closer attention to our spiritual lives;
I invite you to remember who you are and to remember whose you are,
By giving up what is in the way of you experiencing God's presence;
By taking on some practice, small or great to open the way for God;
By loving the next person you meet and the next and the next;
So that we can remember that we are the beloved children of God,
And so that others may know it, too, by our actions and by our words.

And when the tempter whispers in your ear to be someone else;
And that's all Satan can do, whisper;
Allow the power and presence of Christ to work in you all the more,
Say no thanks and remain who you are, a child of God.

Amen.