

*First Sunday in Lent*  
*February 22, 2026*  
*Text: Matthew 4:1-11*  
*The Rev. David B. Hodges*

*Almighty God...come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save.* In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Temptation is something that every one of us faces and deals with on a regular basis. Temptation is defined as the urge or desire to do something, especially something you should not do. We are tempted by many things and temptation comes packaged in many ways. Some temptations are just annoying while other temptations lead to major disruption in our lives. One analogy used compares being tempted to a tug-of-war between self-control on one end and temptations on the other. Temptation is something that we often refer to, as we will do in a few minutes, through the words of the Lord's Prayer when we ask God to ***lead us not into temptation.***

No matter how good we are, or think we are, how disciplined we may be, it is hard to resist some of the things that tempt us and that we think we want or need. As Rita Mae Brown once said, ***lead me not into temptation: I can find it by myself.*** Sometimes when we are being tempted it can feel like trying to drink from a fire hydrant as we get overwhelmed by what comes at us quickly, that keeps coming, and that we just don't know how to handle or deal with. In his book titled Temptation, Daniel Akst, says that our **environment acts on [us] in ways [we] can't even begin to realize.**

In the Book of Common Prayer, which is in the pew rack in front of you, there is a section called *The Catechism* in which there is this question. ***What are we by nature?*** In other words, at the core of our being who are we? The answer is that we are ***made in the image of God.*** The next

question is. *What does it mean to be created in the image of God?* The answer to that is it means *that we are free to make choices*. Finally, there is this question. *Why do we live apart from God.* The answer is that *from the beginning, human beings have misused their freedom and made wrong choices*. Each and every one of us who have been created in God's image, are those who yield to temptation. (Page 845).

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil* (Matthew 4:1). That is how the how we are introduced to a period that describes when Jesus experienced temptation. Forced out and away from others, we are told that Jesus spends forty days and nights in a wilderness fasting where he is tempted by the devil. At the end of that time, the devil, who is also referred to as being the tempter, entices Jesus with several things, food, power, and with a chance to prove who he really is. Knowing that he has gone so long without anything to eat, the first thing the devil tries to do is to get Jesus to make bread out of rocks. Jesus responds saying, *one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God* (Matthew 4:4).

The devil then takes Jesus to Jerusalem and challenges him to jump off the top of the temple and this time Jesus responds by telling the devil that is written that one is not to *put the Lord your God to the test* (Matthew 4:7). Finally, trying one more time the devil takes him up to the top of a mountain and tries to lure Jesus with the power and authority to rule over everything thing he can see. *Worship the Lord your God and serve him*, Jesus says and with that the tempter leaves Jesus alone (Matthew 4:10-11).

Sometimes it feels like the devil is after us and is doing things to try to entice us through the seductive force and lure of temptation. Rowan Williams is the former Archbishop of Canterbury and a well-known theologian who says that we may or may not believe in a personal devil but the

idea of the power of evil still makes sense to us. The time of crisis, Bishop Williams goes on to say, *is when the Devil, the enemy of humanity, is really making hay*. At those times when we are afraid or uncertain the Devil comes in to *manipulate us* and to *reinforce all that's most inhuman in us*.

In the book of 1 Peter in the Bible, the devil is described as our adversary, one who prowls around looking to take over our lives if we let it happen (5.8). In the book of Ephesians St. Paul suggests that we need to put on armor to resist the power of the devil and of evil (6.11-12). God knows that you and I struggle with temptation and with things that pull us away from God, that put distance between us and God. God knows that we fail and that all of us, every one of us, though we have been created in the image of the God, are fragile, vulnerable and sinful human beings.

Today is the first Sunday in what is known in the Church as Lent which began last week on Wednesday on Ash Wednesday. During these 40 days that lead to the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Day, you and I are asked to be more intentional about looking at ourselves and how we are living. We are asked to confess our sins to God. We are asked to try and do things that can help us to help us grow and to develop our spiritual lives. We're asked to exercise some discipline that we might not normally have, to intentionally do some things that will help us develop or strengthen our relationship with God and what it means to be someone who says they follow Jesus. It has been suggested that we need this time and can use this time to help clear our heads of the distractions of life, [to address the temptations that we face] and to re-orient ourselves toward God (David Lose).

But no matter what we do or don't do I do believe we need this time, maybe now more than ever. In writing about Lent and the story of the way in which Jesus was tempted by the devil,

Debie Thomas asks a question. *What does Jesus's temptation story mean for us? Maybe, she says, it means we need to follow Jesus into the desert. Maybe it means we should hunker down and look evil in the face. Maybe it's time to decide who we are and whose we are* (Journey With Jesus, 2/23/20).

God knows that we will not always live up to the promises we make to each other and to God. God knows how hard and intimidating it can be in the wilderness. God knows we are not always ready or willing to look evil in the face. As the Catechism reminds us, we misuse our freedom and we make wrong choices. But you know what? God is never the one who is the tempter, and because of and through the resurrection of Jesus that we will celebrate in a few weeks, we can live in a different way. After his warnings about the devil, the author of 1 Peter goes on to say this: *the God of all grace who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you* (5:10).

It has been pointed out that identity is the focus of the interaction between Jesus and the devil. *If you are the Son of God, if you are who you say you are, then command these stones to become loaves of bread, the devil says. If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down.* Jesus responds to those challenges of who he is by remembering whose he is (David Lose). Each of us will go through these days of Lent in different ways and each of us will observe or not observe Lent in our own way. There is no one way or right way to do this, but I am convinced that what we need right now are faithful people like you and me, people who care, people who are compassionate, people who are willing to focus on and then live out the love, grace and hope of God in a broken, conflicted and tempted world. But no matter what else you do, consider this. Take time to dig more deeply into yourself, into your relationship with God, into who and whose you are as one who has been created in the image of God. Let's use this time to think about how

we might clear our heads of those things that are distracting, those things that may be tempting us and re-orient ourselves toward God

I read something recently that I want to leave with you this morning as we think more about who and whose we are. Remember, Lent is not a time to do penance for being human, it's a time to embrace all that it means to *be* human. Human and vulnerable. Human and beloved. May God help us to live into that and give us the desire to share it with others. (Debie Thomas, "Journey with Jesus, 2/23/20). May it be so for you and for me. Amen.