

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Identifying Your Temptations"
Dr. J. Dent

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First Sunday in Lent

As we begin another Lenten season, we come full circle to being quiet enough before God to know what is going on inside us. What the Lord went through in the desert was in great part about what was going on inside Him. We live in a culture and a time in history where internal spiritual realities carry very little weight or importance. At the same time, there seems to be less and less interest in the difference between evil and good, right and wrong. We live in an age where it is difficult to name events and behaviors that everyone will agree is evil and wrong, or conversely, righteous and good.

We also live in a time where we have very little agreement on what evil is and what good is. Many do not believe that a personal evil exists. Many say there is no devil, even though there might be some malevolent force, although not in a Star Wars kind of way. The Scripture weaves a narrative that there is a person who was high up in God's community who chose to rebel against God and take a number of other community members, probably angels, and chose a kind of opposition to the plan of God. And rather than wiping out such evil, God allows this being and his community to oppose God's plans and community. Whether you believe this or not, it does ring true to the fact that we all struggle with adhering to what we believe is true. We all have a deficit when it comes to personal integrity. We all struggle to do what is right, when powerful forces seem to push us in a direction which is neither good for us, nor our family and friends nor the community at large.

So here we come at another forty day period, where we consider anew what we are like inside. How are we doing in the areas of food, power and mental health? Fasting is really not so much about the calories you take in. It is an examination of one's lifestyle and life choices. I've taken the full forty days in the past and have had a severely restricted food intake, fruits and vegetables once, ten days on water once. I survived. It can be done. It's amazing how much time we take to devote to eating. When you don't have that activity in your life, you have a great deal more amount of time on your hands. What do you do with that time, if you choose to eat less? One thing is pray. And listen.

You can ask yourself what is the most motivating force in your life? Is it your health? Is it your relationships? Is it your work? Is it your recreation or your pet? What makes you want to get up in the morning? These are not obvious questions, at least for me when I am completely honest with myself. I need to often look at what motivates me. This also provides insight into what temptations face me, time wise, activity wise, choices that I have to make everyday.

Temptation is simply a word that gets us to think about what motivates us. What makes us want to do what we know we ought to do? What makes us want to do what we know is not good for us, for our friends or family, and for the community in general?

So fasting is simply another experiment to see how much our lives are devoted to food, or perhaps some particular beverage. You should always be wise when you choose to experiment with your lifestyle in this way. If you have health problems, diabetes, or other major concerns, just cutting out one thing might be the way to look at this. But I didn't die when I was fasting in a somewhat radical way, and I know my parents would have told me that I would have perished with no food for more than a week. I even worked during that time, although I do remember not having as much breath, when I was playing the sax.

The other two temptations Jesus faced were his sense of power and the temptation to end his life. All of us wonder from time to time what kind of power and influence we exert. The extreme example of this kind of reflection is the pop group Tears for Fears that sang "Everybody wants to rule the world." That's not quite true. What might be truer is the sense that everyone wants to rule or control their little world. It is difficult to come to a place of acceptance of the fact that we cannot control those we love, those we care about, those we teach, those we work with, whether as boss or employee. In the end, we can only make our own decisions and choices, and let others to do the same. But it is often hard to come again to this realization because often I think I know better. And I often think I have more influence on others than I really do. Ironically and at the same time, I often do influence others (both negatively and positively) when I am hardly aware of it.

So in this area of power and control, we once again are challenged to give it up to God. We can hardly manage our own lives, let alone others'. So we

turn our will and lives over to the care of God, which I hope is why many of you are here from week to week. Jesus had to do it on a much greater scale. The history of the world was in the balance with his decision. It may not be the history of the world in the balance with my decision, but it certainly is the history of my world in the balance with my decision.

Sometimes life becomes so difficult and so complex, that it seems like the best answer is to end that human life. This is not true. It was the devil's temptation for Jesus to throw himself down. It is the devil's temptation to you and I. I wish sometimes that I could escape the difficulties currently facing me. I think it was my father who used to say that, "I wish I could be the person my dog sees me to be." In other words, I wish I could be the person that everyone really wanted to be around all the time. But I know I'm not. Those closest to me know I have far to go, and that's okay.

We simply cannot escape many of life's difficult problems and pains. I do not believe God wants us to take the option of suicide or assisted suicide. This is a difficult subject and one which I don't have time to address in a more complex way. I simply note my position and what I believe the Scriptures direct us to do.

In these next few weeks we are asked the question, "What are my temptations?" What are those thoughts, activities and behaviours that go against what I know to be the best for me and for the community? What does God think about my temptation? Is there something I can add or subtract in these seven weeks which will give me an insight into the state of my faith, my religion, my spirituality, my relationship with God?

I confess I am still learning a lot about God, myself, others. And as I learn about one of these three, I gain a new perspective on the other two. I hope you will take the time to do the same.

Let us pray.