



1 LENT
MARCH 9, 2014

FIRST, MARSHALL
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

GENESIS 2:15-17, 3:1-7; PSALM 32; ROMANS 5:12-19; MATTHEW 4:1-11
The Devil Made Me Do It?

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

The theme of ***temptation*** dominates our Bible passages for today, even as it exercises a **dominant** place in our daily lives. **No one** is immune from the ever-patient and ever-present lure of temptation.

So it's especially appropriate to talk about it **today** on this first Sunday in the season of Lent. For **temptation** is the fraternal twin, the mirror image, the yin to the yang of that old tradition of ***giving up*** something for Lent. Now, the key for **my** success in a Lenten discipline like that, is to give up something I'd never want anyway, like ***Brussels sprouts*** or ***anchovies!***

As you all know, the moment we **give up** something, or are **denied** a thing that gives us **pleasure**, ***temptation*** appears and knocks incessantly at the doors of our hearts. It's called *forbidden fruit*. And in our passage from Genesis, we see exactly where that expression comes from.

In the Garden of Eden, God instructs the man: You can eat from EVERY tree in the garden...except ***THIS ONE***: the *Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil* is meant to be left alone.

With the stage set, we then jump to chapter 3 where we meet the **serpent**, the craftiest wild animal that the Lord God had made – and though no one tells us what the serpent is thinking, we all know what it wants...

And what does the serpent use to mount its attack on the relationship between God and humanity? Forbidden fruit!

Note how the serpent does not openly incite **rebellion** against God...it simply plants a seed of DOUBT, then waits for the **discontent** to grow. The serpent makes the man and woman **suspicious** of the God who created them ***in love, to love*** and ***be loved***. The serpent leaves them ***wondering why God is selfishly keeping the best of life for himself***.

Here's a little aside: Eve has had a bad rap through the years, as if **she** were **more** guilty than Adam for breaking God's law. But the truth is – Eve has the perfect out! ***God gives the command about the trees only to Adam back in chapter 1***...Eve hadn't been created yet. And if it's true that ***men are from Mars*** and ***women are from Venus***, then there's lots of space for mis-communication.

Even so, the point is: **neither** gender is ***less-or-more*** guilty than the other – in the same way that Adam and Eve are not **more** guilty than you or me. They both snarfed down the serpent's sales-pitch – as you and I would have done – and ***still continue to do***...no? Forbidden fruit...

I love our 17 month old granddaughter, Sophie, for many reasons. One of the most significant is the fact that she's now in that perfect stage of life for demonstrating this very struggle. On the one hand, she is the epitome of the ***innocence of children***. **AND**, at the very same time, she is proof that ***sin is alive and well within us all!***

She's a great kid, and truly holds the key to my old, crusty heart. But she's also a living model of how fruit that has been forbidden makes us crave it all the more... On Thursday, Carolyn and I were babysitting Sophie at our house. She's learned in a hurry all the places where she will evoke a NO from any of us adults.

My wife has some sewing things – pins, needles and scissors – on a low shelf in our bedroom, so when Sophie visits, that door stays shut. Well, returning from one of our many trips ***down-and-back-up*** the stairs from the basement, Sophie saw that bedroom door open and took off as fast as her little legs could move. **And where did she head?** Straight for the pins, needles and scissors!

We all are intimately acquainted with temptation – and **each** of us is a case study in how individualized that experience is. Where one person might be tempted to indulge in one of the seven deadly sins, another is tempted to indulge in the sin of self-righteousness, smugness, self-satisfaction.

But as we know, none of it matters. Says the Apostle Paul in Romans 3:23, ***all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.***

Still, that doesn't stop us from looking for someone to blame our sin on, someone to take **the fall** for **our fall** into sin, and for all of our failing, flops, and fiascos... But then that didn't work so well for Adam and Eve. Remember how they responded when God called them out on their disobedience? Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent...and they both got kicked out of Eden.

Some of you remember the comedian Flip Wilson, who was big in the 60's and 70's. In one skit, he would dress up as Geraldine, do something naughty and exclaim... *The Devil made me do it...*

I want to be clear about this whole **sin thing**: we're not in trouble with God for our *petty peccadilloes*, our *immature indulgences*, our *selfish acts* of sin. God doesn't **like** them, but God doesn't **love** us **less** because of them.

Yes, we should feel badly and confess to God both the bad that we do and the good that we don't...But, as Martin Luther says, all those things are really just *puppy sins*. You know how puppies are: they yip at night, chew up slippers, pee on the carpet...that's about how serious God takes our naughty, selfish behaviors.

That's because there's a **huge** difference between our *puppy sins* and our deadly serious **condition of sin**. This **toxic** sinfulness is *what causes us*:

- to **doubt** that God loves us – and all people – **not** for who we **should be**, but for who we **are** – warts and all;
- to **disregard** the fact that God especially cares for people who are hungry and hurting (the *last*, the *lost*, the *least* and the *lowly*); -and to **disavow** the truth that, indeed, Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

So, let's take a quick look at Jesus' experience of being tempted by Satan out in the desert. Turn to your lesson inserts or bibles...

What are the three temptations Satan uses against Jesus?

- use God's power to satisfy his hunger (stones to bread)
- force God's hand to prove his love (jump off the temple)
- acquire wealth and power (fall down and worship Satan)

In other words, Satan is encouraging us **all** to:

Take care of our physical needs – ‘cause no one else will.

Make God prove that he cares about us – we all need reassurance. Let our worldly desires be our goal in life.

And then, if we get caught in our selfish schemes, we can always make claim: *the Devil made me do it!* But in the end, that’s no defense, is it? The blame game is little help in our attempts to resist temptation. So let’s learn from **Jesus’** response to the tempter, and look to the Lord for a word of good news.

And truly it is there. After each temptation, Jesus responds with a word of scripture. Now, it would be **nice** to say that we **all** know the Bible well enough to have that **protect** us in times of trial. But not to worry – our salvation, our sense of wholeness, our meaning and purpose in life, is **not** dependent on how much Scripture we have memorized, but on this great truth:

We are loved and forgiven
for the sake of Jesus Christ
who takes away the sins of the world –
all of them, for all time – yours and mine included.

And the seal of that gift will be beautifully demonstrated in just a few moments by young

-(8:30) Tatum Diane Bigler when she is baptized.

-(10:45) Emersyn Faye Ourada when she is baptized.

So let’s not get discouraged with **temptation** – let’s not **give up** and **give in** as if we don’t have a choice. Instead, let’s trust the Spirit go to work **on** our **hearts**, to go to work **in** our **lives**, and to cultivate within us God’s great gift of faith. That way, we can **stand with Jesus** and **withstand** temptation.

Then, instead of complaining *The Devil made me do it*, we can confess with joy: *Jesus helped me do it*. Amen.