

Sermon for 2019 Yr C Lent 1
Preached Sunday 3/10/2019 at St. James', Mount Vernon
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Welcome to the season of Lent!

Lent is often understood as the season in which we try to make ourselves better, more faithful people. By giving things up. By taking other things on. By trying harder to pray, or by studying scripture, or by doing good things for others. Ironically, Lent is a season in which all that we try to do, serves mostly to help us miss the point.

Lent is not about what we can do, but about what we can't do.

Lent is not about what we can do, but about what God does for us.

Today's Gospel lesson, about the temptation of Jesus, is the perfect introduction to the season of Lent.

We are prone to hear this lesson as a guide for how we should undertake the forty days of Lent. We think: Jesus resisted the temptations of the Devil, and so we too must resist temptation, just like Jesus. And then we can think about all the difficult temptations that we need to resist, and how we're going to try harder. Or we can make up temptations, like dessert, and resolve to resist the overwhelming temptation of eating chocolate cake! [Maybe that's just me!]

But this way of thinking almost perfectly gets the Gospel story upside-down.

Because the Gospel is not about what Jesus does... the Devil invites Jesus to do things, and Jesus consistently says no. The Devil intends each temptation as an invitation for Jesus to disavow his trust in God. And instead, Jesus takes each temptation as an opportunity to affirm his dependence on God. Jesus doesn't have to do anything, other than to rest in his confidence in his Father.

This gospel today is not about how we need to try harder, work harder, or pray harder. It is instead about having trust in God, letting ourselves rest in him; not about how hard we have to try but about how we can relax into his care for us.

We are surrounded by temptations. We live in a world that is lubricated by temptations. We are constantly tempted to put ourselves first, to turn a blind eye on the troubles of others, to disregard the consequences of our actions. We are tempted to judge others, and to avoid our own responsibility.

We can't avoid our temptations, and we can't just wish them away by our will-power. The Devil knows just what kind of temptation is the most seductive for each of us, and he'll make sure to wave that temptation under our nose right when we are most vulnerable. But Jesus shows us how to meet those temptations that would lure us away from God. Jesus shows us, not what we need to do, but who we can be. We can trust that

God is with us and for us. When we find ourselves tempted to rely upon our selves instead of on God, we can remember that we can't save ourselves, but that God will save us. We can call upon Jesus to help us.

In this season of Lent, practice the humility that accepts that you are human, and that you need Jesus in order to live. God loves you, just as you are. And God gave Jesus to save us, so we don't have to try to save ourselves. All we have to do is let God be God.

Amen.