



**St John's United Church of Christ  
Pastor's Lenten Devotion / Prayer for  
The First Week of Lent  
Wednesday, February 24, 2021**

Greetings St John's UCC Family,

Lent is a very valuable and important tradition in the Christian faith. It's a time to reflect on the state of our lives as we relate to God. For there is so much these days that can distract us from serving God and finding real joy in life. One of our distractions is our smart phones which can occupy us for long periods of time. All of a sudden we come out of it, like coming out of a trance and we ask, "Have I been doing this for the last hour?" There are many other things, of course, that can and do distract us from our connection with God.

I hope you'll find that the message of the scriptures we'll study during Lent will serve as a call from God to get our lives back on track spiritually. The state of our spiritual condition can determine our level of energy, enthusiasm, and joy.

Tradition for the first week of Lent leads us to the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness.

Listen to words of Matthew 4: 1-11: “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup>He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.

<sup>3</sup>The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” <sup>4</sup>But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

<sup>5</sup>Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, <sup>6</sup>saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” <sup>7</sup>Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

<sup>8</sup>Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; <sup>9</sup>and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” <sup>10</sup>Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” <sup>11</sup>Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness where he was tempted by the devil. How else could Jesus know our situation if he had not walked the path we walk? He was tempted in three ways, ways in which we also are tempted.

Jesus had been fasting. He was hungry. He was tempted to turn the stones into bread, to give up on his fast as we also are tempted to give up on things that are good

for us but are hard to do. It's so easy to get distracted by things that give us momentary pleasure but cut us off from what God would want for us.

Second, Jesus was tempted to jump off the pinnacle of the temple, to do something spectacular that would draw attention and make him famous. As we are tempted to satisfy our ego, our need to be "a big shot" and to be in control, to be noticed and revered by others.

And third, Jesus was tempted with all the kingdoms and wealth of the world. As we are tempted to put the obtaining of money and material things ahead of our love, service, and giving to others.

These temptations, for Jesus, were a means of becoming ready to put his mission to serve God first, ahead of all distractions. And for us it's a reminder of what we face every day. Lent can be a kind of wake up call from God to turn away from the temptations and distractions and to move to where God would have us go.

Harry Emerson Fosdick was one of the greatest American preachers of the last century but few people knew that as a young seminary student he reached the breaking point one summer while serving on a mission project in New York City. He went home and was overcome by a deep depression.

One day he stood in the bathroom with a straight razor to his throat, thinking of taking his own life. And then -- and then he heard his father in the other room calling his name, "Harry! Harry!" It called him back. It was like the voice of God calling him back from the abyss.

So friends remember that in your times of being in the wilderness and when temptation comes and offers you the wrong answer, the wrong choice -- the wrong use of power, something to distract you, that you remember that God is calling your name: "You are my beloved son, my beloved daughter, in whom I am well pleased."

Prayer: Wonderful God, on this first week of the season of Lent we hear your voice calling us back, calling us back from the distractions of sin, selfishness, fear, and hopelessness as they have manifested themselves in our lives. May we be open to turn around, open our hearts, and together as your people, follow you back...back to faith, hope, and love. Amen.

Blessings!  
Pastor Jeff Johnson  
St John's United Church of Christ