

March 6, 2022

Texts: Psalm 91: 1-2, 9-16; Luke 4:1-13

Title: "When We Are Tempted"

Pastor John Jewell tells about an episode of the news show, 20/20, sometime back in which some four-year-olds were forced to deal with being tempted. They were left alone in a room. In front of them were some M&Ms. They were told they could have a whole package if they would wait five minutes for a bell to ring before eating the two or three M&Ms in front of them. The struggle of temptation was recorded through a two way mirror. The kids twitched, fidgeted, wiggled and twisted their faces up in knots trying not to grab those M&Ms. About half made it and half said in effect, "To heck with it, I want it right now!"

We all know about that struggle, don't we? And it can often be more serious than M&Ms. Even Jesus can identify with it as we see from the story of his forty days of being tempted in the wilderness. Three times he was tempted to depart from the mission in to take a more selfish turn with his life. He was tempted to make food appear for himself or to use his power in other ways for his personal benefit.

So here's a few things about temptation I'd like us to notice. **The first is that temptation is universal.** We joke about it but we all have to deal with it. It goes back to the story of Adam and Eve.

The late Peter Gomes, former chaplain at Harvard University, once said that "temptation is the single greatest source of human anxiety." Think about it for a while and you'll see that what he says is true. Think of the tests we face every day--

at work, in our family life, among our friends. We are constantly making choices and many of these are moral decisions. Should we speak the truth when a lie would be easier? Should we cut corners to maximize our profits? What's the harm in a little innocent flirtation? Or will we stay on our diet? Will we tell that irritating person just what we think of them? The list goes on and on. We try to not think about the consequences when we give in. And do we ever hear the voice of God, telling us to wake up before it's too late? This stuff happens all the time.

The second thing is that **with God's help temptation is resistible**. We're not helpless although sometimes we do need help. Many of you remember Charles Barkley who at one time played for the 76ers where he was known as "The Round Mound of Rebound."

When Pat Croce became the physical therapist for the team he instituted a new diet and exercise program. Barkley, who was 300 pounds at the time, resisted. He had no desire to pay the price to lose weight and get in shape. After all, he was a great player, even with the extra flab.

Croce is famous as a motivator; it didn't take him too long to coax Barkley into an exercise program. But Charles' eating habits were another story! He'd been known to eat a one-pound bag of M&Ms in one sitting. He had a serious love affair with pizza. One night Pat waited outside Charles' house and ambushed the pizza delivery man who had two pizzas to deliver. Pat took one and one-half of the pizzas away. He also threatened to beat up the delivery man if he ever delivered more than one-

half of a pizza to that address in the future. Charles got the message. That season, he lost fifty pounds. Success often comes because of all the coaches and support people around them.

And of course, all the twelve step groups out there these day are fantastic. It's hard for any of us to admit we have a problem but it's easier perhaps to admit it in the company of people who understand and are willing to support you as long as you're willing to do your part.

Of course, the ultimate key to lessening temptation's hold on our lives is to love God with all your heart and with all your mind. Pastor David Jeremiah says, "Over time I believe I've discovered that temptation isn't so much a matter of what we do but of whom we love. Knowing Christ--really knowing Him, not simply knowing about Him--changes everything. More often than not, power in those difficult moments comes because we've filled our minds with His magnificence, and there's no room for the world's shabby offerings. There's power in the name of Christ, and in His presence as well. Worship and fellowship with God in the morning actually makes it harder to walk out into the world and commit some transgression. The best escape Jesus provides is His own embrace."

I see a lot of dog videos on Facebook. I saw one with a guy who wanted to test his dog's obedience. He placed a tempting piece of meat on the floor. Then he would turn toward the dog and give the command, "No!" The dog, which must have had a strong

urge to go for the meat, was placed in a most difficult situation--to obey or disobey his master's command.

The dog never looked at the meat. It was like, if he did, the temptation would be too much. So he looked steadily at his master's face. There's a lesson for us all. Always look up to the Master's face."

Lent is a season to honestly look within and then as the song goes "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face; then the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace." Amen.