

Wesley United Methodist Church

March 10, 2019

“Tempted.”

Luke 4:1-13

There was a young man named Fred, from the mountains of eastern Tennessee. He was the poster child for lazy and no-good. When he was called up for duty in the Army during the Vietnam War, Fred had high hopes that he would be exempted because of he had double vision.

The doctor said, “See the chart on the wall over there?” “Not very well, Doc. It’s all blurry,” said Fred. “You’ve passed,” said the doctor. Fred protested, “What do you mean I passed? How can I pass when I told you it’s all blurry?” And the doctor replied, “That was your hearing test.”

Have you ever noticed that sometimes life seems to be one big test, one Supersized-Temptation. And in the midst of that test and temptation, sometimes, when we succumb to temptation, we get away with it. Sometimes we don’t suffer any immediate consequences. And that’s when the trouble begins because we start to get cocky. And the minute we think we’ve got it made, well watch this...

Most of the time we’re just like a mouse. Every time we yield to temptation, we get squashed. Just when we think we’ve gotten away with it, down comes the broom and all that trash we thought was safely swept under the carpet, is suddenly exposed.

Today is the first Sunday in Lent. In the United Methodist Church, Lent is that time when we focus on the Passion of Christ. Lent is the 40 days before Easter, not counting Sundays because they are little Easters in and of themselves. The 40 days correspond to the 40 days of testing and temptation which Jesus went through in the Judean wilderness before He began his full-time earthly ministry.

Let’s look at that passage right now: Read Luke 4:1-13

Lent always begins with the temptations, and one of the things this scripture teaches us is that life is one big test, one Super-sized Temptation. Jesus was tested just like you and me. Knowing that, there are two things I want to say today. Jesus gives and forgives.

First Jesus gives. I’m not going into a whole lot of detail about the Temptations, they are as simple and as complex as we want to make them. The first was physical. Jesus was tempted to turn stone into bread, obviously playing on his physical need for food after having fasted for 40 days.

The second was political and spiritual. Jesus was tempted to short-circuit the process and avoid the pain and agony of the cross and slide right into the throne of the world. And all he had to do was change political and spiritual allegiance and bow down to Satan.

The final temptation was theatrical. It was the temptation to force God’s hand by putting on a show. It was the temptation that followed Jesus in every aspect of His ministry. That’s why He didn’t perform more miracles or do more signs and wonders during his ministry. He didn’t want the message to be overshadowed by Brother Love’s Traveling Salvation Show. It wasn’t a show, Jesus invites us into a relationship where we can experience the love of God, not view it like a movie.

This is a reminder that Jesus faced every temptation you and I face every day. We face physical, political, and theatrical temptations in all that we do. We are constantly tempted to think of our physical needs and wants first. We’re constantly tempted to transfer allegiance and take the easy route. And we definitely are tempted to sit back and watch and not be engaged in ministry, convincing ourselves that attendance in worship is all we have to do. And that often won’t make a difference in our lives. Like the folks who come to church and then an hour later cuss out the wait staff because their order got messed up. They were present in church, but nothing happened. No change was made. The message didn’t sink in.

We’re called to be like a powdered doughnut. You see, you can’t eat a powdered doughnut without getting some of the powdered sugar on you. The sweet coating comes off real easily. That’s the way it should be with the love of God. And Jesus gives us the tools to do that. He gives us the power to say “No” to temptation and “Yes” to faith because he has experienced every temptation that we have.

Hebrews 2:18 says, “Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.”

Jesus forgives. And that’s the good news because most of us are like the mouse; we succumb to temptation. Unfortunately for us, unlike the mouse and cheese, temptation usually comes our way in little doses so we tend to nibble ourselves lost like a sheep gone astray.

But the Good News is that Jesus forgives. Romans 10:13 “for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” 1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” And believe it or not, sometimes our attempts to be righteous can become unrighteous.

Here is your test for today. Take a moment to think about those areas in your life when you’ve been in the wilderness, when you’ve been tested either through failure or when you’ve been tested and over came that temptation. I don’t know what kind of temptation you’re struggling with, it could be something simple like the mouse loving the cheese, it may even be your hearing test, or it could be something more dramatic like accusation or judgment thinking we’re better than others...

Think about that temptation in your life and know if you are still struggling, Christ Jesus will help. And if He has already helped, you can give thanks that He was tempted and yet he didn’t sin. Amen.