



Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

First Sunday in Lent

March 5, 2017

“And don’t let us be led into any temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Matthew 4:1-11

The First Sunday IN Lent. Our pathway throughout these weeks will focus on the ancient tradition that Lent is a time of preparation for Holy Baptism. It was so in the earliest Church. Those who would be Baptized at The Great Vigil of Easter would spent the time learning about the life in Christ---soon they would be taught The Lord’s Prayer and the sacred words of confession of Faith first known as “The Roman Creed”/The Apostles’ Creed.

The first image is “Renouncing Evil.” So, the Gospel portion just read. Recall that Jesus’ call to ministry came at the Jordan when He was baptized by John. How the words heard as the descent of the Spirit must have been the “aha” moment of His life on earth. “This is my priceless Son; I am deeply pleased with him.” As Jesus ended His earthly ministry between two thieves, it began as He came to the Jordan and identified with the human family that seeks a place of sorrow for sin and redemption.

THEN...the Spirit led Jesus to be tempted by the devil/the deceiver/the “splitter.” That ancient source of evil which leads to death, separation from God. 40 days...40 nights...like Israel behind Moses through the Red Sea...as if to parallel Jesus’ time from Baptism to renouncing the power of the devil/the evil way. And Jesus is hungry! The strategy is “hit him at the weak spot.”

1. “If...Bread.” The doubt lever is pulled...Self-Serve. “If you are God’s own, quench your hunger, take the stones and make bread.” Seems so simple, so easy, so now; instant gratification, upgrade, something new, retail therapy. Did God really say? “If you are Baptized, why are you going through this? How can you claim to be a child of God when you are struggling when can’t make a sign to prove it?”

Jesus is a man of Scripture and models it to the Church in every time and place...today...the vocation of Holy Baptism is the call to live into and out of the Word of God. Jesus witnesses, “live out of every word that pours from God.” World goods, quick fix miracle are a mirage on the path of FAITHFUL DISCIPLESHIP.

2. “If...Risk.” This one is full of holy things...Jesus in the holy city...at the pinnacle of the holy temple, and is read the Holy Scriptures. HOLY, HOLY, HOLY. As the devil played to the weak spot, so now at the point of strength. How about a little Cheap Manipulation? Jesus is now tempted to prove, in DEED, what He had just claimed in speech. Walk your Talk!

Jesus out “proof-texts” the Tempter. It written in another place “Don’t test out the Lord your God” or “Thou shalt not manipulate the Lord your God.” Uses Scripture as witness of God’s truth! God is God and can trust God.

3. “If you will...I will.” The devil takes Jesus higher and higher. From wilderness to a very high mountain. His love for God’s world is tested when He is offered the world. Raw Power. “Jesus, all yours, just show me a little bit of worship.” Don’t miss it. Evil is not asking Jesus for a whole life of service, just one momentary bow. A wee slip and it is an easy path to give in to the power of darkness! “Bet you can’t eat just ONE!” Just one bow of the knee.

Jesus renounces the devil and all empty promises. “Away Satan!” And that word “THEN, the devil left him.” “And look! Angels came over and waited on his table.” Jesus’ ruling passion is to serve, to live, to die for the sins of the world. No default to worldly goods, cheap manipulation, or raw power. Only to the love the Lord, God, with heart, mind, and soul.

Luther once wrote: “Satan is called the master of a thousand arts, but what shall we call God’s Word, which easily conquers and discomforts that master with all his wile and power.”

It is Lent. Jesus would walk beside us in this time of renewal. A presence to assure us that the power of sin, death, and the Devil is broken and we are called to walk in newness of life, under the sign of the Cross, that we might learn of and lean into the grace that holds on to us forever.

So sacred was the The Lord’s Prayer and the Creed, that no one heard it until they had made their renunciation before Baptism. So sacred the trust that those who were not Baptized left the worship just after the Sermon. As they came ever closer to a Confession of Faith, they first heard the petitions of the prayer, “Led us not into temptation.” Spoken by the One who was and who met darkness with a renewed confidence in the call and plan of God.

It is so for us this Lord’s Day. Let us note again our need for forgiveness, we are broken, and follow with our renunciations as we mark this Lenten beginning in our community.

People of God: Do you renounce the devil and all the forces that defy God? WE RENOUNCE THEM.

Do you renounce the powers of this world that rebel against God? WE RENOUNCE THEM.

Do you renounce the ways of sin that draw you from God? WE RENOUNCE THEM.

Very soon we will confess the Faith of Church, the Faith in to which we were baptized. And next week, “Seeking New Birth” and the story of a man named Nicodemus.

So, we pray: God of love, as in Jesus Christ your gave yourself for us, so may we give ourselves to you, living according to your holy will. Keep our feet firmly in the way where Christ leads us; make our mouths speak the truth that Christ teaches us, fill our bodies with the life that is Christ within us. In his holy name we pray, AMEN.