

Lent 1-February 26, 2023

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7, Romans 5:12-19, Matthew 4:1-11

Every Word Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

*When I received my animal science degree from SDSU, no one really cared what I did next. I could have taken a gap year to explore the country, I could have looked for a sales job with a feed company, I could have looked for a job for a farmer that raised livestock, or I could have done something entirely different from what I was trained for. I found out that is not how it works in ministry. You don't graduate unless you know where you are going. Jesus' baptism is the event that marked the beginning of his ministry and as soon as Jesus was baptized, Jesus had no choice in the matter. Without any delay, Jesus was sent by his Heavenly Father to his first call of ministry.*

*You would think that Jesus would have been able to pull some strings since his Heavenly Father oversaw where he would be sent. His father could have placed him in a congregation that would appreciate all that he could do for them. Who wouldn't want Jesus in their congregation who would eliminate everyone's need for health insurance? If you were sick, he could say the word and you would be healed. No payment of any kind would be required. Who wouldn't want Jesus in their congregation when you would be amazed by every word of his teaching and sermons? Jesus was equipped to go to a congregation that was small or very large. Most congregations that would have called Jesus to be their preacher would have been happy to have him and given him everything that he needed.*

*In today's gospel reading, we learn that Jesus did not choose where he went or waited for a letter of call from places that wanted him. Instead, Jesus was taken or led to his first call. The reading for today left out the word "then" at the beginning which tells us that this was Jesus' first call. Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit from the waters of baptism immediately right into the wilderness. Jesus' first call and stop as his ministry began was to take on the greatest enemy of all. Satan. And Satan was waiting for him.*

*Satan was waiting for Adam and Eve when the Lord placed them in the garden. Rest assured, whenever the Lord gives his word to his chosen people, Satan is listening in the shadows and waiting ever so cleverly for the perfect time to change these words from what God said to what Satan wants them to believe. Satan has only one tool to do this, but this one tool of deception has caused every one of us to fall just as it did Adam and Eve.*

*It seemed so simple in the Garden. Adam and Eve had everything they needed. In the beginning, there were no 10 commandments like Moses later delivered. Adam and Eve had just one. Do not eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die. Adam and Eve were still digesting this one command from God when Satan appeared. They had not taken a bite of any fruit before Satan pulled out his one tool from his bag of tricks and put a seed of doubt in Eve's mind about the words God had just said. Satan didn't even need to put different words in Eve's mind or mouth. Eve did this on her own by adding to what God had said to her by changing the name of the tree to the one that is in the middle of the garden and telling Satan that the Lord told them that they not only couldn't eat the fruit, but they couldn't touch it either. The doubting had already begun and then Satan added to it by directly denying the consequences of death and encouraging Adam and Eve to take a bite because why wouldn't God want his children to die or to know what he knows. Eve's eyes took over and saw the fruit was good and desired to know what God had been keeping from them. Then Eve passed this temptation on to Adam. Adam was an easier target than Eve because Satan knew if you put almost any kind of food in front of a man, it will disappear.*

*Nothing much has changed ever since that day to desire to hear the words that we want to hear and get what we want to have without worrying about the consequences of our sin, especially if they are so small such as eating foods that are out of our reach. We were invited to my son and daughter-in-law's for supper this week. Their children are as well behaved like any preschool age and younger kids that I know. After supper, the oldest child who left the table after supper came back and asked her dad for a treat. He asked her what she wanted. She replied that she wanted the chocolate sea salt covered almonds that were on a high shelf in the pantry. This is always where we place things that seem to be out of our reach, but we can usually use our resources to get what we want. So, her dad agreed and told her that she could have one treat which gave an instant expression of disapproval. She didn't like the words that she heard. So, she left the room. Since she couldn't reach them, she asked grandma if she would help her. Grandma asked her how many she could have, and she hesitated briefly, but then replied "five". Then her sister came into the dining room and asked her dad if she could have some of those treats that are pleasing to the eye and taste. Her dad said, "Yes, you can have one." She had even a stronger look of disapproval and replied that "Grandma said that we could have five." Not much has changed since the garden.*

*In our second reading for today, the Romans must have presented to Paul another option so you wouldn't have to worry about following rules. They suggested that if there were no rules, then there would be no trespass or sin. I gave the Roman's philosophy a try regarding those chocolate covered almonds that my granddaughters had eaten. I had never tasted them before and no one had told me that I couldn't have one or five, so I didn't ask. I just took and ate...several. No rule given; no rule broken. But Paul then laid out the difference between how Adam responded to Satan's temptation in the Garden to Jesus' temptations by Satan in the wilderness.*

*Each of the temptations that Satan gave Jesus were different and much like the different temptations we face today. The first temptation for Jesus to turn stones into loaves of bread wasn't really that big of a sin. Jesus was hungry and Jesus who would one day feed 5000 with two fish and five bread loaves could have easily done this miracle and satisfied his hunger. We each deal with "little sins" like taking chocolate covered almonds without asking permission. We all have gone a few miles over the speed limit without hurting anyone. Satan turns his temptations up a notch in the next temptation when he quotes Psalm 91 to Jesus and commands him to see if he is who he says he is by jumping off the pinnacle of the temple to see if the angels will really come and catch him before hitting the ground. We have all prayed prayers asking God to prove himself to us and then we will believe. We may remember a time, when we quoted a verse from scripture that fits our cause like Satan did. We like some words in scripture, but maybe not EVERY word so we change them from what God really said. Then in Satan's last temptation, he promises to give to Jesus what Jesus came to take into his possession anyway. Jesus came to have all the kingdoms of the world. Satan is good at the word of command. He enjoys telling you what you should or should not do. But Satan does not have any words of promise. The slogan, "Making a deal with the devil" is a truth. Satan has nothing to give you if you don't have something to give in exchange for it. And Satan did not have the kingdoms of the world in his possession to give to Jesus.*

*What is the point of Jesus taking on the greatest enemy as his first call into ministry? Jesus did not do this so you could use him as an example on how to combat your temptations against the devil. Jesus didn't do this so that you could learn more scripture than Satan to send him on his way by quoting verses. No, Jesus took on the power of Satan from the very beginning so that Satan would have no power over you. The message of the temptation of Jesus is not to teach you how to become more obedient to Jesus, but to trust Jesus who was obedient for you. Obedient to every word of his Father, even dying on the cross so that the sins of your temptations would be forgiven. Amen*