

St. Luke's Episcopal Church
The First Sunday in Lent
March 5, 2017
Matthew 4:1-11
The Reverend John P. Carr

New Adam

Adam and Eve were minding their own business in the beautiful garden that God had created when the serpent came along and ruined everything. The crafty serpent first lured Eve into disobedience and then through her, Adam was drawn in to the trap.

They were tested in this and they failed. They had clear instructions from God and they disobeyed God to follow not just the serpent but also what they wanted. This is where life for us as sinners began. Now we have to decide how we will cope with those serpents who enter our lives.

The gist of the story in the garden is that mankind chose and did not choose well. Mankind chose to attempt to have the knowledge of God and live by their own rules not the ones that God had provided.

The passage from Genesis and the Temptation of Jesus are close parallels. Jesus is the new way of life. He is the new Adam for mankind.

Immediately following His identification as the Son of God at His baptism, the Spirit not only descended on Jesus but led Him into the desert *to be tempted* by the devil. There is a lot wrapped up in that word tempted that has confused Christians over the centuries.

The word here, tempted, is used as the word "tested" in this context but with two intents.

It means to test one through a demonstration of stress. This is important. God does not tempt us but He will test us. God tested Abraham when He led him to the mountain to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham passed the test. You will recall that God rescued the Israelites from Egypt and led them into the desert for forty years, *“to humble and test you in order to know your heart. He humbled you to hunger and then He fed you manna to teach you that man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from God.”*

Jesus was led into the desert by the Spirit to be tested to see what was in His heart, just like the Israelites were tested in the desert to learn what was in their hearts. The question is partially answered by comparing Jesus to Abraham and Moses but since He is the Son of God, was there ever any doubt about the outcome? That question deserves evaluation. He was tempted or tested in every way just as we are but did not fail. Is this because He is the Son of God or because He was an obedient Son of God?

The rest of the answer has to do with the beginning of the ministry of Jesus as a son of Israel. This story shows Jesus to be a true Israelite who depends on the Word of God for everything in his physical and spiritual life. It was important that Jesus experience all that the people of His time and all time experienced in the way of temptation or testing.

Why? Because in his faithfulness to God He has shown us the way to live. He refuted all that the devil provided in the way of a test by using Scripture as His shield and strength. Jesus did not waver, He was tired but He was not weak in His responses. He boldly defeated temptation with the Word of God.

He has shown us the way to bear up under temptation and stress by using the very Word of God as our defense and refuge. He is the model of how we are to stand up to the world, the flesh and the devil with all of the opportunities to fail like the first Adam did. Jesus is the new Adam. He showed us the way to righteousness. By Him, through the grace of God, we are saved by following His commandments and believing in Him.

There are times when we think that a temptation or a test is more than we can bear or turn away from. When you get to that point, recall what Paul wrote in **1 Cor. 10:13**, *“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”*

That, is a tremendous bit of scripture for us sinners! He is reassuring us that any temptations or tests that we experience in life have been met by others. Further, God is right there with us and won't let us be tempted beyond what we can bear. And like a good Father, He will provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. That is because He loves us.

Last Thursday night, through the miracle of the cell phone I was able to see my granddaughter walk for the first time even though she is in Atlanta, Georgia. I saw her father gently pick her up when she fell and encourage her to try again and again. He did not do it for her but encouraged her to walk on her own. It was a test for her and when she did walk across the kitchen to her mother, the smile on her face revealed that she knew that she had done it at last and she was filled

with joy. Similarly, when we pass the test, and can do the right thing at last, we are filled with joy for the joy of having done the right thing! We too can walk in righteousness because we have passed the test.

This word, *tempted*, in the Greek not only means tested but it can mean tested to the point of intending failure. The Father, the Spirit, led Jesus into the desert to be tested in the best sense of the word, to prove him through stress. The devil tempted Jesus with the intention of making Him fail and attempting to get Him to deny his identity. Isn't that what our problem is? The devil wants us to fail, he wants us to depend on our own powers on our "selves" to succeed and to deny or turn our backs on our Father.

This is why this story is in the Gospels. It is to show us not only how to escape temptation but that the Son of God has led the way for us to follow. He has shown us how to resist temptation by clothing ourselves with the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.

Finally, there is a bit of wisdom for all of us in a short story I read, about how to support those around you. It was written by a severely wounded Iraq war veteran. It is good advice for all of us as we go through life surrounded by family and friends much as the soldier was surrounded by his band of brothers. He observed after he had gone through many operations to rebuild his shattered legs, that when he was tempted to quit, those around him gave him the strength to carry on. We are much the same. We are all wounded souls. We all need to heal and we all are tempted to quit at times in our faith. What he said was this. *"To my fellow brothers and sisters in arms, I say, stay encouraged and never let anyone tell you that your outcome will be determined by your situation. If someone is down, reach out hard and help pull them up. You will heal faster in the process."*

We are all in this life together. We need to keep the faith and not let our situations diminish our faith. We need to stand up to the test, be brave, be strong in the Word and in prayer, and help those around us who have been wounded in life and pull them up and support them.

For, in saving them, we are saving ourselves in Christ.

Amen