

The First Sunday in Lent - March 9, 2025

Call to Worship

Jesus began his ministry to the world, led by the Spirit into the wilderness.

**As we begin our Lenten journey, let us be led by the Spirit,
even into the uncomfortable places.**

In those forty days, and in that place,
Jesus was faced with hunger, doubt, and testing.

**As we seek to follow Jesus, we would be led,
even into the uncomfortable choices.**

Jesus left the wilderness, faithful and obedient to God,
rejoicing in the One in whom he trusted.

**As we continue on our path to faithfulness,
we will be led by our Christ, rejoicing in the Lord our God.**

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Hymn

Seek ye first

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1. Seek ye first the kingdom of God
and his righteousness,
and all these things shall be added unto you.
Allelu, alleluia!
2. Ask, and it shall be given unto you;
seek and ye shall find;
knock, and the door shall be opened unto you.
Allelu, alleluia!
3. We do not live by bread alone,
but by every word
that proceeds from the mouth of God.
Allelu, alleluia!

"Seek ye first." Words and music by Karen Lafferty. ©1972 Capitol CMG Publishing.
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Prayer of the Day

Hope is the inheritance you gift to us, God our trust, so we might discover that when we are tested, we may call out to you for help; that even when we stumble during our journey, we are carried in your hands.

Grace is the inheritance you share with us, Brother of strangers, not that we might hoard it for ourselves and loved ones only, but we would be willing to be generous to all we meet, making no distinction when it comes to our sisters and brothers.

Peace is the inheritance we receive from you, Spirit of salvation, not that we might settle in and claim it only for a special few, but that we might turn it into that place of refuge for all, where mercy and hope flow into each person's life.

All that we have is an inheritance from you, God in Community, Holy in One, blessings to be shared with all, even as we pray as we are taught,

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Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen

Call to Reconciliation

God makes no distinction between us. We are all sinners, we are all children of God, we are all precious to God, and we are all saved by God. Because God is so impartial, let us confess our common humanity to the One who is generous to all.

Unison Prayer for Forgiveness

We meet you here, God of faithfulness, our hands and lives full of all our foolish ways. Your people, we treat the strangers who walk among us with fear and doubt. We afflict our anger on those who care about us the most. We impose hard words on those who need to hear hope and grace in their lives.

So now we bring our hearts to you, Generous God, setting them down before you in hopes that you will mend them. As you hear our faltering words, we pray you would answer us with your forgiving love. And as you forgive us, may we go forth to be generous with our lives towards others, even as the one who is Lord of all, Jesus Christ, has been so generous to us.

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Assurance of Pardon

As you have confessed, do you so believe? The good news is that there is nothing we do that can conquer us, for we are sheltered in God's gracious mercy and hope.

This is the truth we believe. The Word is in our hearts, and on our lips, as we give thanks to God who is our shelter and our life. Amen.

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Scripture Reading Luke 4:1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." ⁴Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" ⁵Then the devil led

him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” ⁸Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” ⁹Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ ¹¹and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” ¹²Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ¹³When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

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Message

When you think of the devil or Satan, what image is conjured up in your mind? For many the first thing that comes to mind is a red skinned man with horns and a pitch fork. Much of our imagination about Satan or the devil comes from folklore and movies. Some of that folklore comes from conflated images from an 14th century narrative poem call *The Divine Comedy* and the first of the three parts called *Dante's Inferno*. This part of the poem is a fictional account of Dante's journey through Hell. None of what we think of as the devil is biblical. In fact, it might be said that the devil shows up in the bible in ways that are actually attractive, or appealing, and enticing rather than being frightening.

If you think on the first story of temptation that we read about in the Bible, the tempter is a serpent. Adam and Eve certainly don't appear to be afraid of the serpent, there was nothing to fear in the Garden of Eden. The serpent tempts Adam and Eve with power, the knowledge of good and evil. In other words, the serpent tempts Adam and Eve with power and who doesn't like to have even a little power. None of us likes to be powerless. There is something very appealing about having power, and one need not look too far in our world to understand how power can be used for both good and evil.

The story before us today is that of Jesus in the wilderness after his baptism where “the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, saying, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” (Luke 3:21-22) This is significant because as Jesus entered into this time of testing, he knew that he was the Son of God. He didn't go to the dessert to find himself. He went there to prepare for his life of ministering to people. And there are so many details in this story. If you look at it, Jesus was tempted for the forty days by the devil, but it was at the end, when Jesus was famished that the devil really took aim.

Something else to note before we go further. We have understood this time in the dessert to be one of temptation, yet there is a understanding through new scholarship that now translates this Greek word to *testing* rather than *temptation*. This could be significant to our perspective about this story. The last thing that may be helpful is to look at this as a story unique to Jesus. So often this passage of scripture has been used to say to us,

“Jesus was able to face temptation successfully by using scripture so you should be able to as well. Just trust God and you can get through it.” Please remember that not one of us would likely make it through this testing with flying colours. We are not Jesus.

There is value in remembering that scripture has power to teach and lead us, but each of us will fall into temptation or fail in times of testing. For some of us it happens daily even when we so desire to do and be better. Still, the life-changing part of this story or the Good News may be simply to know that this story is one in which we are assured of the power of Jesus and the knowledge that he truly was the Messiah, God made flesh, in whom we can and do put our trust.

Let’s now turn to each of the tests and ponder them in terms of Jesus learning more about what it meant to be God made flesh doing the work of God in and among people. As we consider this first test remember that Jesus was famished as the devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”

This first test is about being fed. It is certainly a personal test, yet it is significant that Jesus refused to be tempted into feeding himself, yet he spends much of his ministry feeding people. Jesus makes sure that people have real bread, something they can sink their teeth into, but also spiritually feeds those who are hungering for meaning and purpose, value and hope. Jesus continues to feed us and we are called to feed others both actual food and spiritual food, sharing our faith and hope in Jesus.

For the second test “the devil led Jesus up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”

This one really hits home in the ways we have witnessed power expressed from the White House over the President of the Ukraine in the last couple of weeks. Now, I am not going to push that analogy to far, but it does speak to power. The devil wanted to be worshipped and the testing was whether or not Jesus would worship the devil rather than God. And Jesus said, no thanks. For Jesus, power to rule was not about power over others, but rather to rule the world with justice and mercy. This kind of power comes from God alone. As human beings we have more examples than we need to see how power is used over others rather than for the good of others. The power of Jesus belongs squarely in the realm of God’s authority. To serve the power of the world, even for good purposes, would mean risking serving something or someone less than God.

For us it means using any power or authority we have over another, whether as a parent, a healthcare professional, a teacher, a caregiver, a politician, a boss, or other person of authority, even the power we have over ourselves, we are to use our power to usher in an age of care and compassion, a time of justice and mercy. We can do that within the sphere of influence we have within our families, homes, friendship circles, businesses

and church. Really, anywhere you find yourself you can work to change the world into a more just and compassionate place for the good of all.

The third and final testing was when “the devil took Jesus to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Jerusalem is where Jesus’ ministry would culminate with his death and resurrection. The devil was pushing timelines here. If he can make Jesus take control now and make God act in this moment than the devil shows what kind of power he has to make God act. But Jesus will not put God to the test. Jesus chose the way of faith, knowing that God acts in God’s own time. There is much work that needs to be done and Jesus will do the work he is called to do as Messiah. Jesus will build the relationship bridge with God so that each of us can know God who created us in God’s image and so that we may know the love, grace, forgiveness, and promise of God with us now and always.

As you can see, each of these temptations or tests were designed to be attractive and enticing in order to lure Jesus away from God. There was nothing frightening about these tests. Each was meant to make Jesus believe that he could be greater and more powerful if he traded his identity as the Son of God to claim the world’s power. Jesus would not take the bait. Each test was intended to put into question how Jesus would respond to the social, political, and religious power offered to him. Instead of falling into temptation or failing the tests, Jesus lived out his answer of refusing to bow to false power.

I close with a paragraph from a commentary on this scripture as written by theologian Sharon Ringe. She writes,

In Luke’s account of the passion and of Jesus’ earthly ministry, the meaning of Jesus’ baptismal omission unfolds, recalling the three tests he has undergone. Though he refused to turn stones into bread, he does feed the hungry. Though he refused political power, the proclamation of God’s empire of justice and peace is the focus of his preaching and teaching. Though he refused to jump off the temple to see if God would send angels to catch him, he goes to the cross in confidence that God’s will for life will trump the world’s decision to execute him. Game, Set, and Match to Jesus! ¹

As we start this Sunday moving into the season of Lent, a time that leads us to the cross and then to resurrection, be assured that the one who we are following is powerful and acts for our benefit. Jesus as Messiah has changed the world and can transform us. In Jesus we can know our value and the value of each person. In the

¹ Ringe, Sharon H. *Feasting on the Word: Year C Volume 2 Lent through Eastertide*. Editors David L. Bartlett, and Barbara Brown Taylor. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2009. P49.

power of the Holy Spirit we are the ones who now live out the justice and mercy of God in the world. This story is one about power, the power of Jesus and in whose name we too can act to feed others, refuse political power that does not practice principals of justice and peace, while having confidence that God's will is that all may have life and have it in abundance.

In Christ, with Christ, and through Christ. Amen.

Prayers of the People

God of grace, you are our Judge and our Hope.

Transform us with your love and harness our energy for your purposes in the world into which Christ came and for which he died.

Hear us as we pray for the world, the church and our community:

We pray for your creation,
staggering under the demands of human activity and expectation.

May this planet be held in reverence in every culture.

Where we are tempted to use resources carelessly,
where human lifestyles endanger homes and habitats of other peoples or other species, where immediate gain tempts people to give no thought for the future,
send your wisdom to guide citizens and decision makers to act responsibly.

We pray for the Church facing the challenges of rebuilding ministry and mission in times of uncertainties and possibility.

Where congregations are tempted to guard traditions and resist new possibilities,
where members magnify differences instead of celebrating our unity in Christ,
where energy for leadership and community life has grown tired,
send your healing and transforming grace.

We pray for relationships tested by conflicts and the lack of mutual understanding
Where families are tempted to nurse grudges and harbour complaints,
where friendships have been wounded by misunderstanding or neglect,
where workplace tensions have arisen over clashing opinions or exhausting demands, send your reconciling and restoring mercy.

We pray for the world filled with increasing threats and conflicts.

Where countries are torn by unrest and persecution,
where communities are diminished by prejudice and discrimination,
where those with power and authority degrade or dismiss their critics,
empower those who work for just solutions and advocate for the powerless.

We pray for all who are troubled and find it hard to face uncertain times,
we pray for those who face illness or loss of any kind,
for those challenged by economic hardship,
and for those faced with the reality of death, their own or of someone dear.
In silence, we name those on our hearts this day:

Embrace each one with your compassion and courage.
Even as we remember the many challenges around us,
we give you thanks for the blessings we know,
for moments of pleasure, for laughter shared,
for conversations that brightened a day.
Thank you for your steadfast love
and the comfort we draw from your presence with us in all things.

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Invitation to the offering

We all have something to share. As we present our offering this morning,
know that what we share enables the Church to reach out in Jesus' name,
meeting needs, offering hope, and working for the justice Jesus proclaimed.

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Hymn

Come, thou almighty King

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|---|---|
| 1. Come, thou almighty King;
help us thy name to sing;
help us to praise.
Father, all glorious,
o'er all victorious,
come and reign over us, Ancient of Days. | 2. Come, thou incarnate Word;
gird on thy mighty sword;
our prayer attend:
come, and thy people bless,
and give thy word success;
Spirit of holiness, on us descend. |
| 3. Come, holy Comforter;
thy sacred witness bear
in this glad hour!
Thou who almighty art,
now rule in every heart,
and ne'er from us depart, Spirit of power. | 4. To the great One-in-Three
eternal praises be
hence evermore!
His sovereign majesty
may we in glory see,
and to eternity love and adore. |

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Benediction

Whatever wilderness the Spirit has brought you to:
walk in boldness, as a beloved child of God
walk in peace, under the shelter of the Most High
walk in faith, knowing Christ walks with you. Amen.

~ written by Joanna Harader, and posted on her **Spacious Faith** blog. <http://spaciousfaith.com/>