

The Spirit leads Jesus into the desert and Jesus fasts for 40 days.

He is tired and he is hungry and he is alone,
and as always, that is when the devil comes to tempt you.

Notice, though, that the temptation is not bread or safety or power.

The temptation is for Jesus to violate his trust in his heavenly Father.

“Use this power for yourself,” the devil says.

“You don’t have to be hungry. Turn these stones into bread.”

“You are the Son of God,” the devil says.

“You don’t have to be alone. Jump off this temple.

Force the angels to save you and take away the loneliness.”

The devil says, “You were sent here to set the world right,

to establish justice and peace. I can make that happen RIGHT NOW.

You don’t have to die on a cross.”

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But Jesus shows us this morning through his faithfulness

what Adam and Eve in the Garden,

and what Moses and the People in the wilderness,

show us through their all-too-human failure:

that we are to trust in God for everything that gives us life.

Trust God for food, for safety, for power. Trust in God for everything.

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Every year the 1st Sunday of Lent begins with the temptation of Jesus,

with Jesus teaching us the lesson we have to learn over & over & over:

trust in God first, and everything and everybody else, second.

It's the lesson we hear every Sunday at the 8:00 service:

“Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ saith:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,
and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

This is the FIRST and great commandment.”

And every year Lent begins with that fundamental lesson because -
and this is the brilliance of Lent -

the Church knows we need to set aside time every year
to face the truth that we aren't very good at trusting God,
and maybe even more importantly,
to admit that we're not all doing all that great
when we trust in our own power.



Jesus invites us today to examine our lives at the most fundamental level,
by asking who you really trust first and most:
God, yourself, or the promises of others.

By asking if maybe we have worked too much in our lives
and neglected the people around us because we live in fear
that we won't be able to provide as much, save as much, have as much
as we think we need.

That maybe our fear of strangers has made us a little too willing
to turn a blind eye as people who unsettle us are dismissed,
or turned away, or arrested.

And that maybe our desire to exert our perspective over others
has led us to use unholy methods
to achieve what we tell ourselves are noble purposes.



Do y'all remember Maslow's hierarchy of needs?

I'm sure it's been replaced with something newer
but the idea is that our basic human needs
build on one another like a pyramid.

First comes safety and security,
and then we can move on to meaningful relationships,
and then after that we can influence the world around us,
and then after all those things, at the top of the hierarchy,
is a sense of transcendence. A sense of God.

There's a lot of truth in that theory but Jesus reminds us this morning
that our faith is built on the radical claim
that the inverse of Maslow's hierarchy is the deeper truth.

That trust in God is our fundamental need.

That trust in God is the base, is the foundation of our lives.

Our safety and security...depend on God.

Our comfort and our meaningful relationships...depend on God.

Our ability to influence the world...depends on God.

Jesus is telling the tempter that God IS the firm foundation, the base,
for everything in our lives,
but too often those of us who try to follow Jesus
forget that fundamental truth.

Too often we think like Maslow.

We come to church when life is going good enough
to enjoy what we think is the luxury of God.

And so Church becomes that place you go
when you've secured FOR YOURSELF all the other hierarchy of needs.

I can't tell you how many people I've bumped into who have
fallen away from church and say the reason
is that life is too chaotic right now.
Or that they're having trouble holding their life together.
Or that they're going through some hard times
and they'll be back when things are more settled.

I get it. I've said those things, too.
But friends, that is a warped understanding of what church is,
or what it should be.

Church is where you come to remember that God
is the foundation of your life, not the cherry on top of your success.
Church is where you give thanks to the one who has brought you this far,
through all the storms of life,
and who has promised to get you through
whatever THIS day will bring.

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We are not here this morning to show off our holiness,
but rather to admit that we are all just works in progress,
to admit our shortcomings to God
and to ask for help to get through this one day.

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So...do not wait until you've got your act together
before coming to this holy place.

Don't wait until you've gotten a steady job and a reliable car.
Don't get sober and then come to church.
Don't wait until you believe the right things.

Don't wait until you can come in here looking like life is wonderful,
or until your kids can sit still (when they're little)
or until you can brag about how great they're doing in adulthood
(when they're big).

Don't wait until you can pledge enough or volunteer enough,
or set a good example.

AND DO NOT WAIT until you are good enough or holy enough
to stand before God unashamed,
because friends, that day is never going to come.



Instead...come as you are.

Come in your Sunday best,
whether this Sunday's best is fresh from the dry cleaner
or was picked up off the floor 20 minutes ago. Come as you are.

Come as you are, because this is where it's supposed to be okay
to not be okay, where it's okay to be struggling to get here,
to hold it together, to be kind. Come as you are.

Come as you are, and despite all the e-news and all the announcements
the only thing we'll ask of you that really matters is this:
be honest with God and be honest with yourself.

Acknowledge your failings to God and to yourself
and you don't have to say a word about them to anybody else.

Confess your sins, ask for forgiveness,

and then try your best to forgive those who have sinned against you.

And if you can do that...only that...if you can do that, beloved...

...then you WILL BE reconciled to God and one another,

and being reconciled,

you will be invited to the banquet of that most heavenly food.

Amen.