

1 Lent A

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7
Psalm 32
Romans 5:12-19
Matthew 4:1-11

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Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, Edmonton
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AGM Sunday

Grace and peace to you from Jesus who loves us.

It's a classic start to lent – from Adam and Eve's temptation in the garden to Jesus his own temptation - we know we are in good company with the challenges we face.

I can remember learning about Adam and Eve when I was in Sunday school. It didn't make a lot of sense to me even then that someone would hold back on one particular tree within a whole garden. It didn't seem like there was any lack of food, but it felt like it was a test. Could any of us hold out on the most beautiful tree in the garden? And I suppose that is often how this story is described, as a test, and certainly one that you do not want to fail.

Now, in my adult life, I don't know that scenario is really helpful to us, because a test is something that we pass or fail. We know through the whole gospel story, that Jesus has already done the work of saving us. We don't need an admission test to be loved. This story has also been used to denigrate women for centuries. We've labeled Eve as the one who is at the core of humanity's downfall and therefore in need of her husband's oversight. But this story isn't about pitting man against women either.

The story of Adam and Eve is just that, a story, designed to help us understand life, temptation, relationships, and most importantly, God.

Fast forward to the gospel of Matthew where we find Jesus too, face-to-face with some odd temptations. In this story Jesus isn't tempted by a fruitful tree, but instead by an unsavoury character called "The Tempter."

The Tempter isn't an actual person or being, but is a personification of the inner voice within us. A tree is a tree is a tree and is not guilty of causing us to do wrong. And the Tempter is only a representation of the desires that come from within. We don't blame The Tempter for bringing these remarkable offers to Jesus, but we do watch carefully to see what he will do with them. As we heard, he didn't give in like Adam and Eve, but was able to thwart off numerous quite remarkable offers.

For us however, the perfect way in which Jesus handled these temptations is problematic for us. We know that over and over again succumb to temptation and make poor and unhelpful choices. The call to be “Christ-like” or “God-like” in our lives is a high bar of expectation. And when we don’t meet it, we can be overcome with guilt or shame. God is not into shaming us.

If we are not able to be perfect like Jesus, then what are we to do with such a story?

Matthew’s point in actually has very little to do with temptation and sin (which may come as a surprise) he isn’t telling us that we better learn to handle sin better, like Jesus, because Matthew knows and we know that we are not perfect. What Matthew is far more concerned about is that we would know who Jesus is, that he is God’s Son. Matthew was building a case for Jesus’s *messiahship*. He is painting a picture that would help his listeners see Jesus as God’s Son, and therefore as the one to follow.

Forget about other charismatic leaders, forget about the Roman Emperor, forget even about the religious leaders – they offer the same old thing in different packaging. In Christ God was doing something different, something new, something that God had never tried before – God became one of us.

God did so, to build closer ties with us and to show us how to build closer ties with one another. As we begin Lent we are invited to renew our commitment to God, to one another, and all creation. But now it’s not a test that we fear we may pass or fail, but it’s an opportunity to regroup. In a world that is persistently dangling before us all means of temptation, we are ever face to face with our own ego and desire to look after only ourselves. God’s way is different.

God forgives our mistakes, the ways we hurt one another, the times we inflict pain, are greedy, negligent. That immense grace enables us to see each other differently. Have you ever mustered the courage to apologize for something you’ve done that hurt someone else? Of course you have. And when you have been stung by someone else’s actions or words – have you ever had to dig deep and tell them you forgive them? I’m sure we all have. This is grace lived in us.

Which brings me to this day, our AGM. There’s no doubt or argument that we are in a challenging time. We may have some difficult decisions to make. We may feel somewhat scared about the future. In these times we’re pressured and uncertain – which are the most likely times we are tempted to rely on ourselves. Inner and outer voices are all around us, but listen to God’s voice. It’s easy to point fingers, yet God calls us to pray.

Holy Spirit, I trust you will remember that God's world is different, remember the grace that has shaped you. You are safe, you are held, you are remembered. Focus on the story that has been intertwined with this community for over 50 years. This story of love, compassion and care, which are the building blocks for the future. Do not allow fear to guide our words and actions, but in all things be prayerful in discernment, gracious in understanding, and grateful for one another. We are one body in Christ. Thanks be to God. Amen.