

**All Saints Episcopal Church**

**Steenrijk**

**Willemstad, Curacao**

**The First Sunday in Lent (A)**

**February 26, 2023**

**DRAFT**

**“Served by the Angels”**

**A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish**

**The Holy Gospel Matthew 4:1-11**

After Jesus was baptized, he was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty

days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you

up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.”” Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Give us the strength to resist our temptations, O God, give us the courage to do what we know is right, and give us the wisdom to discern your way in our life. Amen.

Meister Eckert, a fourteenth century writer on the spiritual life, said, “If you are in rapture in the seventh heaven and hear of an old lady who is hungry, descend from your mystical experience and bring this child of God a bowl of soup.”

Perhaps you too sometimes feel you are in the presence of God Almighty where only you and God matter. The problem with that, Meister Eckert is saying, is that you are no more than half right; the other half, those who are needy, matter just as much to God as do you. And they too seek God, but many times we are the ones who are the barrier between them and God. If one is hungry, then one thinks only of filling one's stomach a bit, and God is far away from one's consideration, except to say a

prayer to find the food we so desperately need.

One of the vestry members in my former parish who was a social worker said, “Joe, offer the person a piece of bread if a person comes to the church and they say they are hungry. If they take it, they are telling the truth.” We always had some bread that we could give people. And many times we had more than that, jelly, and peanut butter, for example.

But the devil offered not bread, but stones, to the famished Lord, but Jesus

would not take the bait. If the devil had offered bread, then the story would probably have turned out quite differently. To challenge someone who is starving to find their own bread, perhaps by turning stones into bread, is patently cruel. If someone is truly hungry and has no money, then we are to give them something to eat, or money to buy some bread.

I was at a conference in California in the same town and went into a gas station convenience store late at night to pick up some items. Both times the

same person was there outside the door wanting money for food. Both times I offered to take them into the convenience store and let them buy whatever they needed, and both time they averred, said 'no'. The second time I asked why they would not let me buy them some food, and they said they only needed vegetables and the convenience store did not sell vegetables (it was California). I said, well, potato chips are a vegetable, but they did not want potato chips, only money. Money was not a gift I was

willing to give at that point. Food, yes.  
Money, no.

There are too many drug dealers who are not at all needy, only greedy, but they have so many addicts in their firm grasp.

= = =

In the play, “Jesus Christ, Super Star” the character of John the Baptist sings, “Turn back, O Man, forswear thy foolish ways.”

This becomes our motto for the forty days of Lent. Let us turn back and disavow our foolish un-Christian ways.

Oftentimes I find that what I tend to avoid is something that contains some problem personal to me. Can't we see so clearly a problem in other people's lives?! But in our own lives we are in complete denial that there is any particular issue.

The cartoon character Charlie Brown was challenged by Linus: "Charlie Brown, do you know what's the trouble with you?" Charlie hesitates for a moment and then flatly says, "No." The two stare at each other through the next cartoon frame. Then Linus says, "The

trouble with you, Charlie Brown, is that you don't want to know what is the trouble with you!"

For several Lents I would talk about doing something in the service of Christ rather than focus on giving up chocolates and desserts and calories. What good can we take on that we did not do, and what can we leave behind that we should not be doing.

Food is one thing we Americans need to be far more circumspect in how we approach life. There is so much food for so little cost here for most of us. Yet in

our midst, the students being trained in our member's school tell him we are not able to study because our stomachs ache for some food.

Yet food still seems to be just the tip of a somewhat larger iceberg. Jesus' next temptation was to be a religious spectacle--maybe a televangelist, I don't know! But doing something that is spectacular or showy is surely a temptation for the so-called religious person. We may help feed the poor on some holiday, but after that we feel we have 'done our duty' for the year.

= = =

Jumping off the pinnacle can be something as simple as bragging on how long we have been sober. Being sober is good, but having to testify to others over and over again about our own sobriety may be just a bit over the top. We may need to go to the next level which may be helping others to become sober and remain sober.

Maybe it's something else we are doing because "it just feels right". But is that thing excluding someone else from

the kingdom of God? Is it blunting our witness? Is it even leading others astray?

Most of us don't get this privilege to hold forth in sermons, so we have to use our lives and how we live them as our main witness. How are we loving and caring to others? How can we let others see the Christ that is within us, the Holy Spirit that inhabits each and every Christian? What steps can we take to help 'Christianize' the world? Giving to the poor is one way. Visiting those who are homebound is another. Taking someone elderly to the doctor may be yet

another good deed we can do. I am sure Christ has something in particular for each of us here today to do to show others that Christ lives in us. And maybe, just maybe, we need to read our Bibles a little bit more. Coming to church on a Sunday is a good thing, as we always hear four portions of the Bible read at each morning service, but how about weekdays and Saturdays? When do we open the Holy Book at home? This may be a special spiritual discipline we need to take up this Lent. I found that if one reads 3.6 pages of the Bible

each day, between three and four pages each day, one will read through the entire Bible in a year. Maybe that is a discipline we can begin in Lent. When was the last time you read through the entire Bible, if ever?

The third temptation Jesus felt was that of becoming a big deal in the eyes of the secular world. If one of the other temptations hasn't captured you yet, maybe this one will. I watched a program about the biography of Donald Trump a few years ago. He was careful to tell each of his grandchildren, do not

drink, do not take drugs, do not smoke, do not wear tattoos, but he seemed to miss the key premise, ‘go to church’, for without a spiritual backbone, the rest of the ‘do not’s” will eventually catch up with them. I can recall my aunt Millie saying that she had someone who worked in her house that always attended a church and who never drank or took drugs or smoked, but they would steal just about anything around if she wasn’t looking. Life is too difficult to cope with if one only has ‘do nots’ to live.

Temptation is always at one of end of the seesaw of our lives, and if we don't have the proper spiritual 'counterweight', then we are sunk. That 'counterweight' may be prayer, Bible reading and Bible study, it may be doing selfless deeds for others, it may be loving the unlovable; this spiritual counterweight may be different and unique for each of us, but being the loving partners of and for Christ in this unforgiving world maybe just what our Lord has called us to do.

In the terrible disaster that overtook Japan 12 years ago, I watched a video clip\* of the tsunami moving in from the sea and overwhelming field after field, house after house, and it headed directly for a highway. In this aerial photography from a helicopter, one could see two cars speeding away from a small low place in the highway where the flood waters had already appeared. And a big white car going the other direction had suddenly stopped and made a slow U-turn on the narrow roadway, with some difficulty, and then began heading back where he

had come from, to higher ground and away from the dangerous waters. In that picture I can imagine that that is what Christ is calling each of us to do this Lent—to look ahead at the dangerous direction we may be going in, and to turn back to the safety of our Lord’s arms and his kingdom. Repentance is just that, turning around from a path that is low and unloving and returning to the high ground where we worship Christ regularly with our presence, with our tithes and offerings, and with our selfless

service. Here is where we can live a truly Holy Lent this year.

Amen.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-12709850>

\*Frames 2:26-2:35, show a large white automobile quickly turning around and headed back as the tsunami wave begins to flow inland across the highway in the direction he was headed.

Description: Lent is a time to look ahead and back and decide to take the road of repentance going forward. What we have done and what we have not done we ask God's forgiveness each week and each day. By putting God back in charge of our lives, we can move forward with the confidence that God will continue to guide us.

Tags: tsunami, Japan, John, Baptist, Eckert, Charlie, Brown, God, Jesus

