3-4/5-17 Rev. Amy Haines

Matthew 4:1-11 Love Deeper Than Desire Dare You to Love Series

…Once there was a small boy who wanted a pair of skates. His parents, hoping to teach him the value of money, informed him that he would have to save the required amount from his allowance. His mother overheard him in his room one afternoon shaking his bank and counting his money. Then she heard the bell on the ice cream truck ringing loudly in the street outside.

Mom waited to see what would happen. The boy wanted the skates, but he also liked ice cream. There was no sound from the room until the vehicle had gone, and the bell could no longer be heard. Then a childish voice was heard in prayer. "Dear Jesus, please don't let the ice cream truck come down my street anymore."

 --Dr. Eugene Brice quoted by Ken Waddell, Sermonshop 3-1-98

 David E. Leininger “Temptation” 2-25-07 leiningers.com, adapted

How many of you have ever been tempted by the bell of an ice cream truck or the smell of a fresh baked doughnut? How many of you have ever been tempted by a good sales price on a piece of equipment or on new technology you want but don’t really need? How many of you have ever been tempted to yell at an umpire or boo at an opposing team, caught up in the mood of a crowd to say things you would not normally say?

…Oscar Wilde once said, "I can resist everything -- except temptation!" Someone else has asked, "Why is it that opportunity knocks only once, yet temptation bangs on the door constantly?"

--From Illustrations Unlimited, p.477 David E. Leininger “Temptation” 2-25-07 leiningers.com

Temptation is nothing new.

It began in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. We have been dealing with the consequences of their choices ever since. Jesus faced temptation not only in the wilderness, but also throughout his ministry. And temptation continues to bang constantly on the door of our lives today, both as individuals as well as a congregation.

..Bishop William Willimon once told about leading a Sunday School class that was studying this temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. After careful study and explanation of each of the three temptations, Dr. Willimon asked, "How are we tempted today?"

A young salesman was the first to speak. "Temptation is when your boss calls you in, as mine did yesterday, and says, `I'm going to give you a real opportunity. I'm going to give you a bigger sales territory. We believe that you are going places, young man.'

"But I don't want a bigger sales territory," the young salesman told his boss. "I'm already away from home four nights a week. It wouldn't be fair to my wife and daughter."

"Look," his boss replied, "we're asking you to do this for your wife and daughter. Don't you want to be a good father? It takes money to support a family these days. Sure, your little girl doesn't take much money now, but think of the future. Think of her future. I'm only asking you to do this for them," the boss said.

The young man told the class, "Now, that's temptation."

-- William Willimon, What's Right with the Church (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1985)

adapted Told by King Duncan, www.sermons.com

Here now on Sunday nights the Mission Committee and friends are struggling with the temptation to do good in ways that make us feel good about giving yet does more harm and leads to shame in those to whom we give.

Temptation comes in many forms. Every day we are surrounded by the urge to do what we know we should not do, the urge to follow our own desires, the urge to turn away from God.

Most temptations fall into one of three categories:

-Physical appetite, -Personal gain, -Power or glory

 -orvseries.org/dareyou- message week 1

These were true in the Garden, they were true in the wilderness, and they are true here today.

These temptations are a desire for something more, beyond what we have now. And often the way we get what we don’t have will be by going our own way or following Satan, whose ways are always counter to God’s ways.

On this first Sunday in Lent, as we journey with Jesus to the cross, and through the cross to the empty tomb, we begin where Jesus began his journey—in the wilderness, facing temptation.

Before Jesus ever turned water into wine, before he said a word to a fisherman to follow him, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness for a forty day fast to prepare him for ministry.

Note that this is the same Spirit who had just descended upon him at his baptism when God affirmed his identity as God’s beloved Son.

Near the end of his fast, when Jesus was most vulnerable, the devil tempted Jesus to satisfy his own desires, to take control of his own destiny, and to choose the greater good.

Our passage today reminds us that while Jesus was the Son of God, fully divine, he was also fully human, and tempted such as we are.

For the first temptation the devil said to Jesus, “If you are the son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”

Jesus was hungry. He had not eaten for 40 days. What would it hurt if he used his powers to fulfill his own needs? What would it hurt for the son of God to re-create a stone into a loaf of bread to fill his physical appetite?

How often do we act to satisfy our own desires without thought to how our actions affect others? We shop on credit without thinking about our home budgets. We make plans with friends without consulting with our spouses. We neglect to return too much change at the store because we do not believe those few dollars or cents matter.

The devil was asking Jesus to use his power to serve himself, yet that is not who Jesus was called to be as the Son of God. Jesus was called to sacrifice himself for others, to die for our salvation, not to use his power to satisfy his own cravings and basic needs.

And so Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 in reply, “One does not live by bread alone.”

We do not live only to have our basic human desires met. We do not live only to eat, drink and be merry. God is not a genie in the bottle, seeking to fill all of our desires. Instead God calls us to sometimes sacrifice our selfish desires in order to reflect the love of God in this world.

For the second temptation the devil said to Jesus, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from this temple, for as Psalm 91 says, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you; on their hands they will bear you up, so you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”

If Jesus had wanted to wow the crowd to get them to listen to him and believe in him,

this miraculous display of God’s care could have been the answer. With such a miraculous show of God’s power and protection, the agony of the cross would later have been avoided. Jesus would have had more than his 15 minutes of fame—his action would have gone viral in a way that everyone would have no doubt about his identity. It would be an easy road to personal gain.

But God does not want us to be “wowed” into following Jesus. God does not want to merely entertain us—God seeks to save us.

In reply to the devil on throwing himself off the high point of the temple, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:16, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”

How often, though, do we pray, “O God, if only you will do such and such for me, then I will do such and such in return.” If only you will cause a miracle to heal my family member, then I will spend more time worshipping you. If only you will give me a sign as to the direction my life shall take, then I will follow faithfully wherever you lead me. If only you will give me the money for this latest gadget, then I will give 4% to you in the offering plate this week.

How often do we try and bargain with God, echoing the devil when the devil says to Jesus, “prove it.” Prove who you are, prove the power of God with a big show, with a mighty miracle.

How often do we challenge God to act rather than trusting God to guide us even when we cannot see what is around the next bend. We think we are invincible, and God will save us from our own stupidity. We believe that we can act any way we want to act and not have to suffer the consequences of our actions.

We test God rather than trust God.

And God is not interested in participating in our agendas—God wants us to trust his agenda, and follow his word. We are not called to echo the devil in our own lives.

For the final temptation the devil said to Jesus, “To you I will give all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor, if you will but fall down and worship me.”

Here the devil is offering all of the rulers and powers of this world to Jesus, offering an easy way to gain control over the nations without suffering and sacrifice. Yet this easy street of glory comes at a price—for who or what we allow to control us becomes the god whom we worship.

…A former IRS agent … once told his pastor about a colleague who had been imprisoned after accepting a bribe. He said, "I was really shocked. This guy was Mr. Clean if there ever was one!"

He went on to share how the agent had received offers over and over again until the amount of the offer was, "too much to resist.”He concluded, “I guess everyone has their price."

 -- John Jewell “In the Thick of Things” lectionarysemons.com 3-1-98

How often in the name of ambition, in the name of getting ahead, do we give in to the devil,

transferring our focus from following God to getting rich or having fame or being successful or popular according to the world?

Jesus knew that success in this world takes our focus away from faithfulness to God. Jesus knew that if we do not worship the one true God we will worship the devil or money or power or fame or control or popularity in God’s place.

So Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:13 in reply, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”

Jesus then commanded Satan, “Away with you! Begone!” And the devil obeyed Jesus’ command and left.

Jesus turned away from the “easy” riches Satan offered, although each one came with a price all its own, turning away from temptation because Jesus’ love for God was deeper than his desire for anything on this earth.

The title of our new Lenten series is “Dare You to Love.” Today we are challenged to love God above all else. I dare you to consider your love for God, and the ways that you love God with all your heart, your mind, your soul, your strength.

I dare you to put God first as individuals as well as a congregation, above any and all selfish desire, above the desire for an easy way in life, above the desire for power and control.

God does not want us to settle for good. God does not want us to settle for what is comfortable. God wants us to trust no matter where we may be led by faith and in ministry.

Jesus trusted enough to be led to the cross, and through the cross to the empty tomb. Jesus trusted enough to know when to act, when to walk away, when to speak, when to stay silent.

Jesus resisted temptation in the wilderness and throughout his ministry. How do we resist temptation, or better yet, how do we turn away from temptation and turn back to God when our desires pull us away from God and God’s ways? We are more apt to follow the poster that reads, “Lead me not into temptation, for I shall find it myself.”

How do we turn away from temptation in order to put God first, in order to love God greater than our selfish desires? We do so by following in the footsteps of Jesus.

Like Jesus, we are called to:

1-spend time in prayer

Before the devil came to test him, Jesus spent time preparing himself through prayer. He listened to his heavenly father’s voice. We, too, are called to prepare ourselves to stand firm in faith by listening to God’s voice.

2- stand firm in God’s Word

Jesus countered the devil’s twisted claims with the truth of God’s Word. Knowing the Word of God can help us stand firm when deciding what is right and what is not.

3- be aware of when we are weakest and most likely to be tempted

The devil came to Jesus when he was famished from his fast and had been apart from the community of faith for forty days.

Today twelve step programs teach us the word HALT- hungry, angry, lonely, tired. In these times when we are weak is when the tempter is strong.

4- keep the vision of life, of who we are and whose we are in front of us

Jesus knew who he was and his purpose on earth. He knew the truth of God’s plan for him and how to live a sinless life. He kept the vision of God’s kingdom ever in front of him as a beacon lighting his way to the cross.

We, too, are called to keep the vision of God’s kingdom ways ever before us, striving to be glimpses of the kingdom of God in this world. We are called to remember who and whose we are—God’s beloved creation—and who we are meant to be—faithful disciples of Christ.

In a moment we will share in the bread and cup of Holy Communion, a powerful reminder that Jesus’ love for us was indeed deeper than any power or glory or personal gain offered by Satan and deeper than any pain suffered at the cross. If Jesus loves us so much, how much are we willing to love God? Every day we are surrounded by temptation in many forms. Every day we are challenged to turn away from God.

May our desire for God be deeper than the desires of this world.

May we intentionally live for God through our everyday choices.

May we show our love for God, and our love for the world, in all we say and do.

May it be so. Let us pray.