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First UMC

Springboro, Ohio

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Series: “Hands Free, Hearts Open, God First”

Message: “The B Word”

Scripture: Luke 4:1-13

 The B word….humm, what is the B word?

 We’re in church so it’s not any of the inappropriate words that begin with B.

 We are in church so it is probably a word that is somewhat spiritual in nature…maybe blessings?

 That would be nice, but wouldn’t we just come out and say it? The same with Bible, Bethlehem, Beatitudes. So maybe it’s a topic that is a little less comfortable to talk about.

 It’s probably connected to our scripture for today. If we look there, we will find bread and building, but they don’t represent the whole.

 So let’s think about the whole story. Our Scripture this week is the narrative of the temptation of Jesus. Our word is connected to the whole of the story.

 If I share it Jeopardy or crossword style, it is a 10 letter word describing that which helps us resist temptation.

 Our B word is boundaries.

 Boundaries in our life, work, and relationships are so important. They help us to keep what is most important in life what is most important. When we don’t set up boundaries to protect our physical and mental health, our relationships, our time for work and rest, and our faith, often we get off track, crossing into an area or way of life that isn’t healthy for us or for others.

 I called it the B word because it is an area that many of us struggle with. Some of us are too relaxed on our boundaries. Some of us are a little too inflexible in our boundaries and they have become walls that prevent growth and change. Some of us are a little too wide as we set boundaries, some of us too narrow.

 So we have to know ourselves and our personal tendencies toward the idea and practice of boundaries in order to benefit the most from them. We have to seek God’s wisdom in setting them.

 Goethe gets at the heart of why boundaries are so important. He says, “Things that matter must never be at the mercy of things which matter least.” It seems that our culture is very good at this right now. Too often things that matter least are consuming our time and attention and we don’t have time, energy or passion left for the things that really matter.

 Boundaries help us keep our focus on what is most important. If you think about sports, they help keep the game on the field or court. They provide a limited space so that athletes and fans are all safe and able to work together and enjoy the competition.

 Boundaries for children do the same thing. They provide an area of safety and stability so that growth can happen.

 It’s the same for all of us. As we grow up the field size gets larger, the boundaries expand, but they are critical for all of us so that we can stay focused on what is most important in life. Otherwise we will have a tendency to veer off course, to lose our focus, and end up in the places that are dangerous and confusing, places that make it harder to see and resist the temptations that undermine and destroy the things that are most important to us.

 Rachael Macy Statton talks about the realization that her hands were so full with life and work and technology that she lost track of the boundaries in her life. She says, “They blended into each other to the point that there were no longer any protected areas. Daily distraction was invited into the sacred spaces of my life.”

 Boundaries help us say yes to what is most important and no to what is not so important. They remind us that there is a time and season for everything in life. They help us free our hands and they help our hearts stay open so that we can experience the blessings in life.

 Statton sums it up this way: “Boundaries enable us to nurture relationships, passions, core beliefs that matter most. Healthy parameters provide the structure, motivation, and insight to say no to the things that can harm what is most precious to you.”

 We see the way that Jesus uses boundaries to resist temptation in our scripture today. The boundaries help him to remember who God is, who he is, and to remember his purpose.

 We read this story during this season of Lent, and we follow Jesus’ example and do something during this 40 days to help us keep God first.

 Jesus’ went to the desert to be closer to God, but the devil, of course, saw it as an opportunity to undermine his relationship with God, and his passion and purpose.

 Have you ever noticed that? Whatever you’ve give up or pledged to do or not do to grow closer to God, it seems to show up even more during Lent—that really nice person who is waving homemade chocolate chip cookies under your nose.

 But you can say no, for this season at least, because you have drawn this boundary line in this area. It helps you refine your focus on Jesus. It is a decision that is made intentionally and helps you stay strong in times of temptation.

 So as we look at the story, the first temptation is to turn a stone into bread. Often as we think about this, we consider the things that we rely on beside God, that we think we can’t live without and put above God. That’s definitely part of it.

 But this time, as I came to the text, I thought about how we use words. In our culture today, words are thrown around with no regards for boundaries or respect or even truth. They are used to manipulate, to inflame, to hurt, and to destroy. They are used for selfish gain.

 And here we see the devil using words in that way, to manipulate Jesus and to try to get him to use his words for his own gain. “If you really are, prove it. Turn this stone to bread.”

 Jesus replies, “Man does not live by bread alone.” And if you continue the verse from Deuteronomy, “but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.”

 Jesus sets a boundary for his words. They must reflect God’s word and God’s truth. We are invited to do the same. To set God’s word as the boundary for our words. Before we speak, this boundary challenges us to ask, will this reflect the word of God? Will it reflect God’s truth? Will it convey grace, kindness, love, truth in love, rather than that which is harsh and self-indulgent? Will they remind us and others who we are, God’s beloved, spoken into existence by God’s love and redeemed and sustained by Jesus, the word of God.

 The second temptation is that the devil shows Jesus the Kingdoms of the world and offers them to Jesus if he worships them. Too often in our lives we think we need it all right now: power, authority, stuff. Too often we will sacrifice the future, everything, to have it now. We will go into debt. We will work more hours that is healthy. As we do, we destroy our peace of mind, our health, and our relationships.

 The devil and Jesus both knew that all of heaven and earth belonged to God. And Jesus would redeem the kingdoms of the earth through his death and resurrection. But if the devil could just distract him for this moment and make him think that he could have it all now without the hard work, without the suffering, then Jesus would lose an eternal reign to gain a kingdom of this moment.

 The boundary helps Jesus resist: “I will worship God and serve him alone.”

 Our challenge is the same—to not sacrifice what is most important by trying to gain everything now.

 In the third temptation the devil takes Jesus to the highest point on the temple and challenges him to throw himself off as surely the angels will rescue him.

 Jesus was tired, weak, lonely, at this point. Just give up, the devil says. You shouldn’t have to suffer. You should be rescued from all of this. Give up and see if anyone cares.

 There are those moments in life when we have lost sight of the boundaries of rest, of laughter, of community, of the blessings of life. In these times we begin to think in all or nothing terms. We are either at the top of the pinnacle or throwing ourself off of it. The voices of negativity creep in and cause fear and doubt to make us want to over react, to not trust God to bring us through this hard time.

 Jesus comes back with the final boundary: “Do not put God to the test.”

 The challenge for us is to trust God, to remember who we are. We are beloved, forgiven, and given gifts in life to share.

 And so we draw the boundary that excludes the negative, extreme way of thinking. We refuse to test God and others, but instead trust God and bless others.

 So as you think about what is most important to you in life: family, faith, friends, health…what boundaries do you need to draw to protect them so that you will be ready when temptation comes along and is so very persuasive?

 Stafford shares some of the boundaries that she has learned to create in her life:

 “In our house, we speak kindly and respectfully, even when we disagree.

 In our house, human beings take precedence over electronic devices.

 In our house, today matters more than yesterday.

 In our house, grace is served daily. We’re all learning here.

 In our house, there is room for mistakes and room to breathe.

 In our house, we look for the blessings.

 May we take the time to create the boundaries that help us focus on what is most important and to stay on the path that leads to abundant life.