

**GROUNDING IN GOD**  
**Matthew 4:1-11; Psalm 32**  
**Rev. Shannon A White**  
**Preached at Grace Baptist Church, Norwalk**  
**1st Sunday in Lent, March 1, 2020**

What a week it's been. Whether you were caught up in the fear of the stock market plunge or fears over the Coronavirus or the politics of our nation... it's enough to get anyone rattled, or at least to tempt us to be rattled. Thank God for the Scriptures, and for communities of faith which remind us as disciples of Jesus of the importance of being grounded in God. Our faith reminds us that no matter what is happening, we are going to be OK. As has been true throughout the millennia, God will never leave us or abandon us.

I am what you call a lectionary preacher. The common lectionary lays out the Bible texts in a 3-year cycle (minus a few controversial texts). It's used by many preachers across denominational lines. I like it because it forces me to preach on topics that I might not be drawn to if left to my own inclinations. Today's Gospel text on temptation is one of those. So here we go...

Temptation... it happens to all of us as human beings who live in a fallen world. We may be tempted, for example, by: power/control; money; sex, ego; whether to tell the truth or cheat; we may be motivated by fear of losing what we have or not getting what we want. And when we are overwhelmed, we also may be tempted to be lulled into inactivity and silence. That's complacency. We may be tempted to take the easy way out and not to say anything when we see something wrong or when we are convinced into believing what we're told without doing our own homework or investigation about something.

Now, there's a difference between being tempted and being tested in our faith. James 1:13-15 says, "Let no one say when they are tempted, "I am tempted by God;" for God cannot be tempted with evil and God tempts no one; but each person is tempted when he/she is lured and enticed by his/her own desire. Then desire, when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death."

So, God never tempts us... but the scriptures say God DOES test our faith at times for the purpose of making us stronger. The Epistle of James continues this way:

"Count it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness." The difference is.... testing makes your faith stronger. Temptation is meant to drag you down and pull you away from God by succumbing to internal and very human pulls.

We are all accountable for our spiritual lives. We all need to seek spiritual guidance so we may be spiritual grown-ups. Thank goodness for pastors, like Pastor Curtis, who encourage you to grow in your lives in Christ.

But this morning, we're dealing with temptation. And given that we are all tempted at times... how do we respond? Matthew's gospel says Jesus was led up into the wilderness in order to be tempted by the devil. But did you notice? It says he was led by the Spirit. In other words, the Spirit KNEW Jesus would be tempted. Not only that, but Jesus was in what we call a liminal space... that's the thin space where the line between the physical and spiritual is barely noticeable. If you've ever fasted from food, you know that you become much more sensitive to the world of the spirit and flesh. Your perception is different. Well, Jesus was there. Add to that, his presence in the wilderness for 40 days (just as Moses did before receiving the 10 Commandments and Elijah did) and you've got the makings of a spiritual dynamic of epic proportions. Something was bound to happen... and it did.

We're told the devil tempted Jesus with forsaking his identity. He did it first by appealing to where he was weakest in the moment... his hunger (If you're the son of God... then command these stones to become loaves of bread); the second time the devil appealed to his identity and tempted him with egoism... self-glory. The third temptation was that of power and prestige: I will give you all the power and prestige of these kingdoms and their splendor... if you just bow down and kneel before me. In his weakened state, 40 days of fasting out in the wilderness... Jesus easily could have given it all up... just with a "yes." Instead, he leaned on the words of scripture. Each time he quoted the words of God... and it says the devil left him.

Listen now to the words of the Psalmist. (Read **Psalm 32**)

Did you hear... happy are those whose transgression is forgiven; whose sin is covered? The Psalmist assumes that we, as the faithful, WILL indeed succumb at times to temptation. We are not Jesus. We are not perfect. We will never be able to resist temptation 100% of the time... we're human. That's what the cross is for... Jesus saying... even though what you have done pains me... I have forgiven you. You have another chance. Does that mean we have permission to go out and do anything, knowing we will be forgiven? No... when we do things which go against what God would have for us, it hurts us, and we have to face consequences of what we've done. But love of God is never far away in those times. But the more we learn and grow in our relationship with God, the more we will WANT to do what is best for us spiritually, because it brings us more joy to follow God's will for our lives for the glory of God. It's very fulfilling to be used to bring God glory... isn't it?

But that doesn't mean it will always be easy... here's a story about a woman who was tested and tempted beyond what we might consider humanly possible and yet did not succumb to the temptation.

When I was a young adult, my mother introduced me to the book *The Hiding Place* by Corrie Ten Boom. Has anyone here read it? It's the true story about a woman who was born in 1892 to a working-class family in Amsterdam, Netherlands. Her father was a watchmaker, and she eventually became the first female watchmaker in her country. The Ten Booms were people of deep and enduring faith and put their faith into action by offering shelter, food and money to people in need. As a young woman, Corrie established a teen youth club which taught girls' religious education and classes in the performing arts as well as arts and crafts.

In 1940, the Germans invaded the Netherlands. As part of their occupation, Corrie's youth club was banned. Then one day, a well-dressed woman appeared at the ten Boom's door asking if they would take her in and hide her. She was Jewish. Without hesitation, Casper Ten Boom (Corrie's father) said, "God's people are always welcome." Their home became "The Hiding Place." Corrie and her sister Betsie took charge and opened their home to Jewish and Gentile refugees who were members of the resistance movement, and as a result they were sought after by the Gestapo and its Dutch counterpart. (Much like many people did during the days of the underground railroad in the days of slavery here in the US).

On February 28, 1944, someone told the Nazis about the ten Booms' work; that day the Nazis arrested the entire ten Boom family along with some others who were visiting the house that day. They were sent to a prison camp. Those who were hidden were not discovered. (Tempted?)

Corrie was initially held in solitary confinement. After three months, she was taken to her first hearing. At her trial, Corrie spoke about her work with the mentally disabled; the Nazi lieutenant scoffed, because the Nazis had been killing mentally disabled individuals for years in accordance with their eugenics policies. Ten Boom defended her work by saying that in the eyes of God, a mentally disabled person might be more valuable "than a watchmaker. Or a lieutenant." (tempted?)

Corrie and Betsie were sent to several more camps before ending up at the notorious Ravensbrück concentration camp, a women's labor camp in Germany. There, they held worship services after the hard days at work by using a Bible that they had managed to smuggle in. Betsie's health deteriorated, and she died in December 1944 at the age of 59 after 11 months in captivity. Before she died, she told Corrie, "There is no pit so deep that

He [God] is not deeper still." Fifteen days later, Corrie was released. Afterwards, she was told that her release was because of a clerical error and that a week later, all the women in her age group were sent to the gas chambers.

Corrie returned home in the midst of the winter when hunger was rampant. She still opened her doors to the mentally disabled who were in hiding for fear of execution.

After all of the suffering she endured at the hands of her captors, after the war, Corrie set up a shelter which housed those who had collaborated with the Germans during the war. She later even returned and met with 2 German soldiers who had been particularly cruel to her sister and forgave them. (tempted to hold onto her anger?)

Quite a story. How did she have such courage in the face of such hatred and evil action? I can't imagine that she wasn't tempted to stop and take it easy... to not stand up. To keep her mouth shut and to succumb to the power of her captors and forsake her faith.

But she didn't. She leaned on God in the midst of a period of great testing. She leaned on the scriptures...perhaps even **Psalm 32**. This tune was written to go along with her story which pulls on the words of that Psalm:

### **Corrie Ten Boom You Are My Hiding Place**

*You are my hiding place;  
You always fill my heart  
With songs of deliverance  
Whenever I am afraid  
I will trust in You  
I will trust in You  
Let the weak say I am strong  
In the strength of the Lord.*

God will never tempt us. That's the work of the devil, or the deceiver, or our desires/ego run amok... people have lots of ways of talking about that force which pulls us away from the best intentions God would have for our lives and tells us life is better going down another path. But that path does NOT bring joy. I'm telling you... I know.

We are given Jesus' example to follow: WHEN, not IF we are tempted, we need to be grounded in our faith in God-- Grounded in the scriptures which remind us of God's faithfulness and love and grace. But if we fall, THANK GOD, for the love and work of Jesus... whose work on the cross promises us if we confess our sin, Jesus is faithful and just and will forgive us our sin.

It's no mistake that at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, he is first tempted... Before he even begins the work of healing and saving and redeeming and truth-telling, before that powerful, Spirit-led work is begun, the Deceiver tries to derail it all. That's how you know something powerful is about to happen... if you're tempted. But hold fast. Be grounded in God.

Friends, this journey of faith is NOT for the faint of heart. These days in which we are living require us to be strong in our faith, to know God's promises—to be grounded in God and to get up and keep getting up when we fall so that we may be used for the glory of God in a world where people are hurting and needing God's love.

Alleluia Amen!