

WGUMC March 9, 2014 Lent 1
"Adam: The Remake" Matthew 4:1-11

When we pray The Lord's Prayer, we say, "Lead us not into temptation," but that is exactly what the Spirit does to Jesus in our Gospel story this morning. The rest of us, on the other hand, don't need to be led. We are perfectly capable of finding the way ourselves! (Rita Mae Brown)

Maybe that's why the Lenten season always begins with the story of the temptation. It helps to remember that this happens immediately after Jesus' baptism. So the temptation of Jesus comes at the very beginning of his ministry and that made me think of the temptation of Adam and Eve at the beginning of human history.

Do you remember the story? We have the first couple, Adam and Eve. Everything's perfect. Think about it: Adam can't brag about his mother's cooking; Eve can't tell Adam about all the other men she could have married! A match made in heaven, except that they were in a garden.

In the garden, Adam and Eve are safe and secure. They have everything they need. Now, compare that to Jesus in the wilderness, not safe, not secure, and with nothing to eat for 40 days. In the garden, there's a crafty serpent; in the wilderness, a wily Satan. In the garden, Adam is tempted; Eve is deceived. In the wilderness, Jesus is also tempted, but he is not deceived.

Adam and Even listen to the serpent and eat the fruit because they want to BE LIKE God. Jesus, on the other hand, doesn't eat and dismisses the devil because he BELONGS to God.

That's why St. Paul refers to Jesus as the new Adam. We might say: the Remake. Unlike the typical movie remake, Jesus is a vast improvement on the original. Paul tells the Corinthians, "The first man, Adam, became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit...The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven...Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the

image of the man of heaven." [I Corinthians 15:45,47,49; see also Romans 5:12-21] But not until we meet and pass the test.

The word *temptation* means: "test." In order to be the new Adam, Jesus has to pass the test. He has to overcome the temptations that overcame Adam. And if we want to belong to the one who belongs to God, so do we.

Good thing we have the crib sheet for our big test right here in the Gospel of Matthew. One of the interesting things about the three questions that the devil has for Jesus is that each one of them operates on a different level. In fact, the devil is going to test Jesus on all levels of his life: on the level of his personal needs, on the level of his relationship to others, and on the level of his relationship to worldly power.

We experience temptation and commit sin on all three of these levels. So if we're going to be saved from our many-layered sin, we're going to need a multidimensional savior. Here in Matthew, we get one.

Let's begin with the first temptation: "command these stones to become loaves of bread." Notice that the devil isn't tempting Jesus with something that is bad for him. We aren't talking about cigarettes or slot machines. Like the fruit in the garden, bread is a good thing. The fruit made Adam wise; the bread will keep Jesus alive.

Now I know how Methodists feel about food, but I have to tell you that there is something in life even more necessary than cookies at coffee hour and Jesus chose it: "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Jesus seems to be saying that if you are trying to satisfy your cravings with anything less than God, you are going to go hungry.

Last September, on the steps of the capitol building in Washington, D.C., people of faith were fasting for immigration reform. At the same time, inmates at Pelican Bay State Prison were on a hunger strike to put an end to long-term solitary

confinement. And on my birthday, Pope Francis called a worldwide day of fasting for peace in Syria. Throughout the ages, there have always been people who have understood what Paul said in Romans: "For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." [Romans 14:17]

Bottom line: you are *not* what you eat. You are far more important than that. You are a child of God. You belong to God!

As you can see, Satan fails to tempt Jesus on the level of his personal needs and decides to take it up a notch. So, he takes Jesus to the very top of the temple and tempts him to make a spectacle of himself. Satan whispers, "Go ahead, jump. The angels will catch you. And when the video goes viral, you'll be a star. The people will love you. Everyone will want you. They'll discover that they need you."

To be loved, to be wanted, to be needed. We spend an awful lot of our time making sure we fall into one of those

categories. But Jesus knows that our relationships with other people can be a powerful distraction from the main attraction.

Your last name doesn't have to be Kardashian to be trying too hard to be loved. You don't have to be a celebrity to make a mess of your priorities. The problem is that a lot of us are conditioned to expect that our marriages, our families, and our friends will fill the hole in our soul that can't be filled by any human being because it is a God-shaped hole.

With God already filling up his soul, Jesus didn't need a fan club, didn't need 15 minutes of fame, and certainly didn't need the devil for an agent. He dismissed him, saying, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”

Now Satan has struck out on two levels: the personal and the relational. So he tries one more time. This time, he's going global. Satan takes Jesus to a high mountain, shows him all the kingdoms of the world, and tries to tempt him to be a superpower.

Here's a warning for the world's superpowers. There is no more dangerous place for a king or a country to be than on this mountain. As they say, absolute power corrupts absolutely.

But this is an even more dangerous place for Jesus to be. That's because the devil is offering Jesus something that has already been promised to him. Paul writes in Philippians that Jesus is the name above every name, the name at which "every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."

[Philippians 2:9-11] But in that same passage, what does Jesus have to do to get to that exalted place? He has to empty himself of his power. He has to humble himself in obedience, even if that leads to his death, even if that takes him to a cross. [Philippians 2:6-8]

What the devil is offering Jesus is a shortcut: the gain without any of the pain; exaltation without humiliation; resurrection without crucifixion.

Kings and countries fall for this temptation all the time. For instance, the world's leaders like to gather to talk about climate change but the most powerful countries, the ones that are causing the changes, won't agree to anything that will cause them any real economic or political pain.

Of course, men in dark suits are not the only ones who try to use their power to avoid the pain. As Christians, we experience a similar temptation every time we go looking for salvation without first making a personal confession; every time we say we want God in our life, but we are not willing to give up the things that keep God out of our life; every time we go looking for love without allowing ourselves to be vulnerable.

Jesus knows that there's no shortcut to glory in this life. There's no way to be truly alive without being susceptible to suffering. There's no way to avoid all the pain and still obtain the prize. There is no position powerful enough, no bank account big enough, no drug strong enough to deliver us from

the agony of being human. So, if someone is selling you that bill of goods, better just say: “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”

So, in summary, that's how Jesus did in the wilderness what Adam failed to do in the garden. By reliving the temptation, Jesus remade for us a pathway to salvation. Lent is a perfect time to let God remake us. All we have to do is what Jesus did. On the multiple-choice test of life, we just have to make the choice to belong to God each and every day. Whatever situation you are facing, whatever options you are considering, just ask yourself this question: Does this bring me closer to God? If it doesn't, you don't need it. And if it does, you can't live without it. Make that choice for God always and in everything, and I promise you that the demons that harass you will leave you alone and angels will come wait on you.