

**St. Andrew's Church - February 21, 2010**  
Sermon "Temptation" - The Rev. Douglas Kendall

Lord God,  
May the words of my mouth,  
And the thoughts and meditations of all of our hearts  
Be acceptable to you our rock and our redeemer. AMEN

We are into the season of Lent now.  
The season of Sin and wretchedness.  
The season of giving things up,  
the season of resisting temptation.  
With Pancake Tuesday, or Shrove Tuesday, or Mardis Gras or carnival this week  
we marked the end of the season of Epiphany,  
and with Ash Wednesday, we mark the beginning of the season of Lent.  
Lent is the forty days between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday,  
but if you sit down with your calendar  
you will notice this does not quite add up.  
There are more than forty days in there.  
That is because traditionally the forty days do not include Sundays.  
The forty days of Lent may be fast days,  
but Sundays are always Feast days.

The forty days of Lent represent the forty days  
that Jesus spent fasting in the wilderness, and being tempted by the devil.  
That is why many people give up something for Lent.  
This tradition dates back to about the fourth century,  
And has varied from not eating meat on Fridays,  
To not eating any mammals during Lent,  
To no eating any meat for the entire 40 days,  
To the more modern idea of "giving something up for Lent".  
I discovered this week that the "giving something up for Lent" idea,  
Is more of a Protestant idea, but is rooted in the Roman Catholic tradition,  
Of fasting during Lent.  
This idea of giving something up for Lent  
is a way of symbolically fasting with Jesus through the forty days,  
that he was in the desert after his baptism.  
and in our own little way, resist the temptations that Jesus faced.

For most of the last 10 years of so I have given up coffee for Lent.  
This is not a big thing I know, it is nothing compared to Jesus fasting,

but it is important to me, because I do really enjoy my coffee.  
I wouldn't say I am addicted, I do not go through any withdrawal,  
And get headaches or anything like that,  
though I do find myself a little more tired than usual.

Let me tell you how it started for me?

One year I joked about giving up Coffee for lent  
in my sermon on the first Sunday of Lent,  
And a nice older lady after church said,  
With a sly grin...

"Do you think you can really do it?"

"Are you going to give up coffee for lent?"

She knew how much I enjoy my coffee.

I looked back at her and with a similar grin said

"I'll give up coffee  
if you give up your afternoon gin and tonic."  
Which I knew she really enjoyed.

And the gauntlet had been thrown down.

I got through the first week without coffee,

And decided the second week to add no sweets.

And then the third week I had survived no coffee and no sweets,

So I thought I would add no eating between meals.

By the fourth week of Lent I had added no television.

And by the end of Lent...

I was so self-righteous,  
No one could stand me.

Of course I do not give up coffee during this Lenten season

In order to feel pious or self righteous...

that is just a pleasant side effect for me.

I give up coffee to remember Jesus fasting in the wilderness

at the beginning of his ministry,

taking 40 days to be alone with God

and wrestling with what his life would mean.

When I crave coffee during Lent,

it makes me think of God and the meaning of my own life,

Even just a little.

The other thing I have discovered,

Is that since I follow the tradition

that the forty days of lent do not include Sunday.

I am allowed to have coffee on Sundays.

This means that through the season of Lent,

I really look forward to Sundays!

But Lent does not just have to be about giving things up.

There is another ancient tradition as well that the season of lent is about justice,

And there are three facets to that Justice:

Justice towards God,

Justice towards the self,

and justice towards others.

Giving something up for Lent is one of those facets.

Justice towards God is expressed in a renewed emphasis on prayer during Lent,

Taking more time to pray as Jesus did in the wilderness,

Taking more time to be alone with God and to listen for God's voice,

Among all of the other voices we hear each and every day.

A group of us who are on the Board of Directors

for Gracefield Christian Camp and Retreat Centre,

and working on a 100 year plan for the future of the camp.

To begin this plan we have all committed to 100 days of prayer,

Seeking God's wisdom and direction on what God has planned for us

For the next 100 years.

It will be an interesting journey as we intentionally listen for God's voice,

Over these 100 days.

And so Lent can also be a time of setting aside a special time for prayer.

Justice towards the self is expressed through some sort of fasting,

Or giving up some sort of food or drink.

And Justice towards others is expressed through giving to others.

And this can be with time or talents or treasure.

Rather than just giving something up for Lent,

This is taking on something new,

Some new way of serving others,

And in that way remembering Jesus call to reach out to others.

In some ways I think we miss the point

When we simply try to give something up for Lent,

when we see Lent as another opportunity to make new years resolutions.

Jesus temptations were not about giving up chocolate for forty days,

or giving up dessert, or even giving up coffee.

When Jesus was tempted by the devil or Satan, or the tempter in the wilderness,

It was about something much more serious.

It was about Jesus very existence,

It was about personal safety and security,

And it was about wealth and power

and conforming to the standards of this world.

Let's look quickly at Jesus three temptations,

and perhaps see that Jesus was not alone in these temptations.

After fasting for forty days,

the first thing that the tempter tried to do,

was to convince Jesus to turn stones into bread.

If Jesus were to have a weakness at that moment, being truly human

it would be hungry, after forty days of fasting.

Jesus responded not with his own thoughts and his own ideas,

But with the strength of scripture,

and a recognition that satisfying desires of the moment.

may have long lasting consequences.

Jesus could also not help but be thinking of the ancient stories

of the Israelites in the wilderness for forty years,

as he spent his forty days in the wilderness.

He could not help but remember

their calling out to God for food in the wilderness.

And the ancient words from Deuteronomy were his response to the temptation.

***“One does not live by bread alone,”*** Jesus said,

***“but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”***

If you recall, this time of trial in the wilderness comes immediately after,

Jesus baptism.

The words that had just come from God's mouth,

the last words before Jesus was swept away by the Spirit,

were, ***“This is my son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”***

Those are the words proceeding from God's mouth that satisfy Jesus hunger.

The second temptation is for all earthly power and wealth.

Imagine the good Jesus could have done

if he had been ruler of the Roman empire,

of the whole world.

Imagine the freedom that money could bring,

Imagine the change for good Jesus could have brought,  
with all of the power and wealth of the world.

But that power and wealth comes with a price, it comes with a compromise.

The tempter said,

***“All this will be yours,  
all you have to do is bow down and worship me.”***

Surely Jesus could have that kind of power and wealth without becoming corrupt.

Surely there are some people who could hold power and wealth  
without becoming corrupt.

In Jesus day, and when Luke wrote these words in the first century,  
this temptation would have sounded very familiar  
to the Jewish people.

If they were willing to become Romans,  
their businesses would have a much better chance to thrive.

They could become rich very quickly in the Roman empire,  
all they had to do, was show they were Roman  
by worshipping the Roman Gods, especially Caesar.

Some did, and gained wealth and power; but at what cost?

Jesus response to the tempter was to say,

***“It is written,  
‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”***

The third temptation in the Gospel of Luke  
is about personal safety and security.

It seems to me that in recent years, especially since September 11

Our world has been obsessed with safety and security,  
At a personal level and at a national level.

Safety and security.

Where does it come from, how can we get it?

***The Tempter took Jesus to the highest point in Jerusalem,  
And challenged him again,***

***“If you are the son of God, throw yourself down from here.”***

And then the tempter, learning from Jesus, also quotes scripture to back his point.

A passage about God protecting him.

Again, right at the beginning of Jesus ministry,

just as he was about to do something very dangerous,

challenging the political and religious status quo,  
upsetting the balance of religions and state  
something that he would eventually be killed for,  
Jesus might have been tempted

by an assurance of personal safety and security from God.

But Jesus knows there is something more important than keeping his body safe.

There is something that is more valuable than personal safety and security,  
that is following the will of God.

Jesus is not tricked.

“Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”

And with those words the temptations were over,

And the angels ministered to Jesus.

Jesus had resisted all of the temptations.

The irony of course is that in time

Jesus will return to all of those temptations,

But in a different way.

Jesus will produce bread, not for himself, but for others,

And not out of stones, but out of a boy's simple lunch.

In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus will once again face the challenge  
of his own personal safety and security,

but he will choose to give it up for our sakes,

with his own words, “Not my will, but your will O God”

And he will be crowned the king of the Jews,

But he will show that true strength is shown not in grasping for power,

But on showing God's strength through our weakness.

Today at the first Sunday in the season of Lent.

It is a season of reflecting on who we are, who God wants us to be,

And who we can become.

It is a time for some people, of giving up some things

to remember Jesus forty days of fasting in the wilderness.

Lent is also a time of Justice.

Justice towards God,

Justice towards the self,

and justice towards others.

We are just at the beginning of the season of Lent right now.

We still have most of the forty days ahead of us.

This is a time for reflection.

This is a time for renewed emphasis on prayer.

And this is a time of reaching out to others.

As we go through these forty days of Lent,

We remember Jesus time in the wilderness, and the temptations he faced.

And we think about our own temptations.

Where will we find food that really nourishes us and does not leave us hungry?

Will we ever know safety and security in our lives?

What are we willing to give up or compromise in order to have money and power?

In Jesus name, AMEN