

We are now fully into the Season of Lent in the Church calendar. Those who maybe don't know what Lent is, you're going to be hearing that word a lot over the next 6 weeks. The word Lent comes from the Old English word meaning Spring, as in the Season of weather we're about to enter. More religiously, though, Lent is a season in our church year when we are called to focus our attention on God and to turn away from sin. In the early days of the Christian Church, Lent was a time of preparation for people to join the Church. People who had not been baptized were still on the outside of the Church. They learned about the faith and were prepared for their baptism. On Easter, at midnight they would be Baptized into the faith. Today, Lent is still seen as a time of preparation as we journey together towards Easter. Some churches still use Lent as a time of preparation for new members and confirmation.

Today is the first Sunday in Lent. I am fairly certain that the story of Jesus' temptation comes up every year in the lectionary on the first Sunday in Lent. Jesus is taken, or driven out into as some texts say, out into the desert or wilderness, where he spends 40 days and 40 nights alone. And it is after 40 days and nights in the wilderness that Jesus is tempted by the Tempter, or in Hebrew Ha Satan. Two things of note as I begin my sermon. First, as has been the case for several weeks now, geography matters in the Bible, especially in Matthew. Jesus is in the wilderness, the desert. It is almost certain that Matthew is drawing a connection between Jesus' wilderness experience and the wilderness experience of the nation of Israel. That's why the number 40 appears in this passage as well. Matthew is drawing a connection between these two stories and how they are pivotal. In the wilderness, Jesus is asked to make bread, like the Israelites beg God for bread and receive manna. In the wilderness, the Israelites longed for security and their possessions, just like Jesus is tempted with dominion over everything. And in the desert, the Israelites put God to the test, wondering if he has led them out to the desert to die, just like Satan tempts Jesus to jump off the highest point to test if God has led him out to the desert to die. I bring this connection up to you all today to remind you that Matthew is trying to let us know that Jesus knew what real temptation is like, and he prevailed. Jesus shows us what can happen in the wilderness of our lives when we rely upon God.

I love this idea of using Lent as a time when we rely more on God and less on our own abilities to get us through our wilderness journeys. I don't know about you, but I believe that self-reliance, while often seen as a good thing, can also get us into a lot of trouble. It is true that we should be able to do things on our own, but it is also true that we need to rely more on God. In today's passage, The Tempter was trying to get Jesus to rely upon himself and his own power. "If you are the Son of God, then you can do this." "Why don't you just give it a try...it won't hurt anything." How often have all of us heard that inner voice in our head, trying to get us to do something that we know isn't right? I don't know about you, but I've become really good at justifying things I want to do, even if I know they're bad for me. "One more piece of cake...you need it." During this season of Lent, I want you to think about ways that we can draw closer to God and away from those things that turn our attention away from God.

I told the few people who went to the Ash Wednesday service last week that one of my Lenten practices this year is trying to rely less upon my phone for entertainment. I spend so much time on Facebook and playing games on my phone in the evenings when I'm not working. It distracts me and I can tune out of the world. But here's the thing, whether it is the phone or something else, when we allow our things to become important in our lives, there can be a point in which we allow them to turn our attention away from God. I can just check my Facebook page and an hour later, whole episodes of tv shows have happened and I couldn't tell you what happened. I think we all need diversion and entertainment. Life would be too stressful otherwise. But when we allow our stuff to turn our attention away from God, that is when things become a problem. I don't know about you but the first thing I check in the morning and the last thing I look at before I go to bed is my phone. I check my emails and my calendars and my Facebook. It gives me a false sense of power and control over my life, which is the real temptation. This season of Lent, I want to focus more on my relationship with God and less upon my phone and the false sense of control and power it gives me.

We have a chance this season of Lent to really focus on our faith journey and our relationship with Christ. I encourage you to take the next 6 weeks to really dig into your faith. Where are the places that you need to work on in your faith? For some of us like me, we need to learn to trust God and allow God to rule over our lives, not our phones or our gadgets. For others, it might be learning to trust God and let go

of some much stuff in your life. We have a hording mentality in our culture. We allow stuff to give us a sense of security that should come from God. For others, it might be learning to say the word, "NO." People pleasing and wanting to be needed are so tempting. I fall into that trap too. We don't want to disappoint anybody, so we over-commit ourselves and then we get exhausted and all we want to do on our time off is sleep and we don't have any energy for anything else. Whatever those temptations in the wilderness are for you, I encourage you take time this Lenten season and focus on God. Take time to pray and read Scriptures. Scriptures were what got Jesus through his temptation. Go to church more often. Pray with and for your family more often. Take the family out to brunch or make brunch together instead of committing yourself to another event/activity. Put down your phone more often and meet up with a friend for dinner. I'm going to try this sometime soon when I meet up with friends for dinner. The first person to pick up their phone during dinner must buy dinner for everyone else. In the forty day wilderness journey that Jesus went through, he spent his time focusing and gearing up for his ministry and journey to the cross. Let us spend these next 40 days doing the same thing. Amen and amen.