

The Look of Temptation

Ps. 91:1-2, 9-16; Lu. 4:1-13, 2-21-10

TEMPTATIONS, we all have them, but we all are a bit hesitant when it comes to talking about them; at least when we are speaking in the present tense.

Today's temptations are too close to home. If we speak of them we fear that some how, we will let the devil out of the bottle and may succumb to the temptation.

There was the sweet and pious southern bell who went to church every Sunday, prayer meeting every Wednesday and read her Bible every day, but was in the midst of an ugly divorce and was struggling with the issues of forgiveness and bitterness with her X. One day as she walked along the seashore she came upon a bottle that had been properly corked and was lying on the shore. She proceeded to open it and a genie popped out granting any three wishes she would make with one condition; anything she asked for her X would receive twice what she asked for; *this really bothered her*. First, she wished for one million dollars, puff; there it was at her feet. But suddenly she had a vision and saw her X with 2 million. Now bitterness was turning to envy, (a bad temptation for such a sweet person). Second she wished for a new Cadillac, poof, she had it and her X had two. Now more exasperated, feeling very envious, but not dumb, she wished that in her sleep that night she would have a very bad dream and be scared, only *HALF* to death.

So it is; we all fear what will happen to us if we verbalize the temptations of today.

Yesterday's temptations are more safe today's. We are able to speak with some confidence about the nature of those temptations. We have survived in the fight against them, or, if we did succumb, we are hopefully wiser.

Matthew and Luke write of the temptation of Jesus obviously, in the past tense, they didn't put pen to paper until many years after Jesus went under the three temptations mentioned in our reading for today.

In Mark, there are only 2 verses about the temptation of Jesus; it only says he was driven into the wilderness where he was tempted by Satan, specifics left out.

However, in all three versions, Jesus' temptations are past tense and someone else is speaking of them, not Jesus himself; which makes it a bit easier.

Matter of fact, don't we all kind of like to speak of the temptations of others? We can project our foibles unto their experiences and somehow vicariously overlook our own.

One of the greatest temptations is to be fooled into thinking we have a right to delve into the temptations of others. How clever temptation is!

On this, the first Sunday of Lent, we look at the three temptations of Jesus and realize that his temptations, were all potentially a leap from one place to another; spiritually, mentally and physically. A leap from what he knew was right, to a place of great question and uncertainty.

Yielding would mean a place of unknown vulnerability, where he would sign his life over to another, and sell out to materialism, power and physical comfort. He was being offered a place, where he had it with in his power, to give his power away, by three simple acts of, why not? Just say, "Yes!"

Taste the unforbidden fruit, if it doesn't work out you surely can renegotiate with Satan! Who will know anyway?????????

That's the way it is with temptation. It always makes sense in the stem of one's brain and the hidden places of one's heart. How do I know if I don't try it? The battle within begins to wage a debate of what is and what could be, for a price.

As I said earlier, it's easier to talk about past temptations, and so I will. The year was 1963, I was a freshman in college and I had not yet learned how to study. (I don't know how I made it through High School.) I had failed a course. It wasn't for lack of studying; I had tried hard but just didn't get it and this professor was tough.

Well, temptation always seems to have a way. For a part time campus job, I cleaned the offices of several of the faculty. As the academic term ended, the professor who had failed me threw away all the tests for the semester.

Late one evening, as I cleaned his office, there, right in front of me was the questions and answers for every test. And, I would have to take that same class again next year, it was not an elective. I looked *very close* to make sure my eyes weren't mistaken! They weren't!

The common routine of my janitorial job was to empty the wastebaskets into a larger container and then make my way to the coal fired boiler, open the door and throw all paper into the fires of hell. (This was about 40 years before recycling)

Surely a few of these fine specimens (just one of each test) needed to be rescued from hell. (pause) It was about 50 steps from that office to the boiler room and the fires of destruction, but, it could have just as well have been 500 or 5000.

I can still remember, looking down at that wastebasket and thinking I had won the lottery. My conscience hung in the balance.

Finally,,,,,,,,,,,,, I remember the relief when I gave a big heave-ho to the papers as they were sucked in by the draft of the fire; a calming sense of relief washed over my conscience. I had failed the course but, in many ways, had passed a bigger test. I wish I could say that of all the temptations I have faced.

That was a temptation that took place 47 years ago. Please don't ask me about the temptations I am having today.

All of us are tempted, but not all temptations lead to sin; for it is only in yielding, we sin. It is *what we do* with these moments of potential down fall that test our mettle in the crucibles of life. And, of course, it is only by the grace of God that we are able to resist and turn possible disaster into character.

Jesus was tempted in every way as we are, says the writer of Hebrews, yet with out sin. In each of the three examples of his temptations, he quotes scripture, and finds the defensive tools of spiritual warfare.

Surely Psalm 91 must have been a part of his memory on his occasions of temptation, and we can be sure there were more than just three.

Listen again to the words of comfort and protection; "because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent; for he will

command his angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways. When they call to me I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them.” Ps. 91:9-11, 15.

But our temptations don't all turn out this well, do they. We slide so easily from clarity of conscience to the fog of appetite. And the forty days of Jesus, for us, turns into forty or eighty years.

The older we get, the less our flesh tempts us, but the amazing ingenuity of temptation never ends. The twists and turns of ethical, moral, and spiritual landscape are just as real as David's lust for Bathsheba, only in our ageing; our senses may be duller in recognizing temptation for what it is.

Thank God, we are not in this dilemma by ourselves. We have an advocate who intercedes for us whenever we are at the precipice of capitulation. And if we fall, (surely we will at times) the net of grace will enable us to salvage character out of catastrophe.

I think it's called REDEMPTION!