

Transcript of 1st Sunday in Lent

Welcome to worship.

On Saint Time Change Sunday, you gave up an hour of sleep just for Lent, didn't we?

I do like to talk a little bit about Lent and practices.

I would never ever advocate people giving up coffee and chocolate during Lent.

I just won't.

Because I would have already broken that all by about Wednesday afternoon.

But many of us find it helpful actually to add something.

And I'll talk about that for a minute.

That if you were to say, "Take up a writer, a devotional writer that you've been meaning to read during Lent," that might be a good thing.

Or learning a new skill. Or even doing something that's beneficial for the body.

Or as one of my friends does, he makes it a more systematic process to do morning and evening prayer.

There's something interesting that happens when you add something to your life.

That other things have to be bumped aside for a while.

So it's kind of a gentle giving up in favour of embracing something else.

So that might be a thought.

Our Lent and practice collectively will be to learn a new hymn.

And we will be doing that through Lent with the hymn of the day.

We'll be singing it each week.

And there will always be four verses of our hymn.

But the last verse will change each week to fit the week in Lent that we find

ourselves.

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke.

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness,

where for forty days he was tested by the devil.

He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished.

The devil said to him, "Since you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread."

Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

Then the devil led Jesus up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.

And the devil said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please."

If you then will worship me, it will all be yours.

Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.'"

Then the devil led Jesus to Jerusalem and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him,

"Since you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written.

He will command his angels concerning you to protect you, and on their hands they will bury you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."

And Jesus answered, saying, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

When the devil had finished every test, he departed from Jesus until an opportune time.

The gospel of our Lord.

Won't you be seated?

The Sermon

Grace and peace to you.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you.

O God, our strength and redeemer.

And now for something completely different.

Some of you got that reference.

Thank you.

Here's the completely different.

We're going to start with the end of this gospel reading and work backward.

Does anybody know or can anybody guess when the opportune time was that Jesus would be tested again?

Even roughly will help.

How about if I toss a name out for you?

Golgotha.

Aha, I see some of those synapses are firing even though it is time to change Sunday.

You might remember, especially in Luke's gospel, where there were hecklers at Jesus' execution who yell, "Well, since you're the Son of God, why don't you hudini your way right off that executioner's scaffold?"

Maybe Jesus could have, but what would have happened if he did?

What would have become of God's mission to restore all things?

What would have become of love winning out even over death had Jesus not

passed the test?

The word testing is the most appropriate word for what happens to Jesus in the wilderness.

I know we called it the temptation.

That seems more like luring.

But many of us have experienced what it is to go through different kinds of tests, medical tests.

Maybe you have had a cardiac stress test in your life.

What is the goal of such a thing except for you to exert to the point where your heart is just near saying enough already?

Or maybe you've gone to a physiotherapist and you have either range of motion tests like the one that I do regularly for a frozen shoulder.

That's about it.

It's a test to see how far it can be pushed before integrity fails.

So think about Jesus in the wilderness.

How far can Jesus be pushed before he sells out, before he becomes something other than the one that God pronounces him to be at baptism, that beloved Son?

Because Jesus very easily could have denied his own humanity, for example, and turned those stones to bread.

It was interesting for me to read what life would be like for a 30-year-old in Jesus' day.

The life expectancy in that time was about 40 if you were lucky.

If you were poor, you might make it to 40, but you weren't a real glamorous 40.

By then you probably would have been set with health problems that nowadays people face in their 80s and 90s.

So if we assume that Jesus comes from a poor background where he doesn't have access to the fine foods that the Roman legions had,

imagine this person at age 30 as Luke places him.

We might picture the young superman out in the desert ready to take him on,

but he's probably already then pretty bowed and broken, or as a friend of mine used to like to say, run hard and put away wet.

So he's vulnerable in the wilderness, this truly human Jesus,

and for him to do some sort of partier trick to transmogrify, for those of you who like Calvin and Hobbes,

that word was just for you, to transmogrify the stone to bread.

That would have denied his humanity. It would have denied the significant part of who Jesus was.

Likewise, I think the church faces similar tasks.

Even though we don't have supernatural wherewithal, sometimes we are tempted to deny who we are, where we are, and what's happening in the here and now.

Jesus' tests come in a variety of ways.

His response, even when people quote Scripture at him to try to win an argument,

he uses Scripture right back not to win, not to manipulate, but to call us to trust, to call us to faithfulness to a God who is faithful,

who is abounding instead fast love.

Imagine had Jesus decided to take the tempter up on that offer of worshiping him and being given all kinds of temporal power.

It's like the quick fix.

We might be tempted ourselves for quick fixes.

Or maybe to reach back in the old playbook for something that worked really well 20 years ago and hope that it's going to work again.

Just like that.

Because if we have a program or a process or a plan, maybe instead we're invited to trust God instead.

Oh yes, let's plan. Let's commit ourselves to processes.

But what is it that we are really putting our trust in when we do that?

That's the question of a test.

That's the question that we all face in the end, isn't it?

With tests.

And for Jesus, when we mention that he chose to do something other than use his divine power and privilege to avoid human suffering,

well, maybe we can do that, maybe we can't, but you know, we're not Jesus.

And we may or may not pass some of those tests.

But I think it is no accident that Jesus taught us a prayer.

And if you want a little editorial comment, because maybe there haven't been enough yet,

when we pray the Lord's Prayer, the version that says, "Save us from the time of trial,"

that is actually the closest translation.

Save us from that time of trial, that time of testing, that time when we fall into despair

and think maybe we should trust in something or someone else because it's so difficult to trust in God.

The church prays, we individually pray, "Save us from the time of trial."

And the trial for us, as we understand it, is misdirected trust.

And that's the test that Jesus is subjected to, and that is the test that I believe we too face.

And so, when the trials come and the stress test has us hitting the wall,
church, us individually, to whom are we loyal? Really.

Home do we trust? Really.

And here's where we take a very important leaf from Luke's notebook.

It was the Spirit who infused Jesus' life and led Him and guided Him in the wilderness,

just as it was the Spirit who infused God's partner people after they were freed from slavery

and led them through the wilderness for 40 years.

May that same Spirit dwell in us richly, and may that same Spirit lead, and may that same Spirit guide us.

Amen.