

Resources for Parish Worship



The Lenten journey has sometimes come to be thought of as a time of “giving things up”. This is a rather domesticated way of thinking of the disciplines which are the true characterisation of this season. The disciplines of Lent (fasting, prayer and giving – including giving of oneself in service) are really tools to enable us to deal with the big three temptations that we all face – sex, power and money. These were, essentially, the temptation that Jesus had to face, and the Lenten

disciplines enable us to learn from Jesus how to render these temptations powerless in our own lives. This, first Sunday in Lent, gives us the opportunity to confront these temptations head on, and make the commitment to follow Jesus in the Lenten disciplines for the next few weeks.

May our worship today empower us to do the work of becoming more Christ-like.

INTRODUCTIONS

These may be included in the Parish Magazine, in the weekly service sheet, or by the lector as an introduction to the readings.

Genesis 2 : 15-17, 3 : 1-7

Our readings at the beginning of Lent are all concerned with doing right or wrong, and knowing the difference. In the ancient tale of how evil came into the world, the first human beings in the Garden of Eden succumbed to temptation.

Romans 5 : 12-19

Paul's words are complicated to hear, as he draw new meaning from the old story of Adam. Humanity has been innately sinful since the beginning of time, but through one new man, Jesus, we are now not condemned for our sins. God's gift of righteousness offers us the possibility of a new and free life.

Matthew 4 : 1-11

In the first garden of the world, Eve could not resist the temptation to please herself and not God. When Jesus faced the temptation to bring in his kingdom by using the levers of worldly power, he was strong to resist. He always chose God's ways, not man's.

[Click here to view the readings](#)

http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Genesis%202:%2015-17,%203:%201-7%0Acw%20Psalms%2032%0ARomans%205:%2012-19%0AMatthew%204:%201-11

LECTIONARY NOTES 1

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7:

I love the story-telling quality of this text. Growing up, going to [Camp Aldersgate](#), the then-director Rick Stackpole used to tell this story about the creation of the world, about how the turtle had to swim to the bottom of the water to pick up sand to make the land. I loved those stories, and loved camp, and was shaped by experiences there. So then, I read this story, with phrases like, "now the serpent was more crafty than any other," and I can just hear the intonation of a story-teller sharing this with people thousands of years ago. And no doubt, as we have it to read today, this story shaped the people, and their faith, as they sought to understand God at work in their world.

For other great creations stories, check out two of my favorite C.S. Lewis books: *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Magician's Nephew* and from the space trilogy: *Perelandra*.

Read closely and carefully: compare what the snake says God says, with what Eve says God says, with what God actually says. It's like a game of telephone, where the truth gets slightly altered in each telling.

Nakedness. Today, perhaps it seems no one has shame in nakedness, if we look at media images... but emotional nakedness - perhaps we fear that now more than ever. What does it mean to be naked before God? What are you ashamed of God seeing?

Psalm 32:

Watch for the change of voice in verse 8-9. It threw me off for a couple minutes. First the psalmist is talking to God, then God to the psalmist. "I will counsel you with my eye upon you," says God. What an image! Being a [Lord of the Rings](#) fan, the big eye of *Sauron* comes to mind first, but that's not exactly how I like to imagine the eye of God! Think perhaps instead of those pretty "God's Eye" craft projects you might have completed in elementary school.

There's a **Hide and Seek** theme going on here. The psalmist talks about **hiding** and **not hiding** our sinfulness from God. But the psalmist also talks about God being **our hiding place**. God is the one seeking us. We can **hide from** God or **hide in** God. Which will it be? God will **cover** our sin.

Note the theme of *clean slates* - God is wiping out our sins.

Romans 5:12-19:

Make sure to read the beginning of chapter 5 to pick up Paul's whole conversation here.

Paul is talking about Jesus being the one through whom grace comes, just as through Adam our sin comes. I have questions about original sin and substitutionary atonement for myself, but what I like is this verse: "the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through one man's trespass, *much more surely* have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ." (emphasis added) It always makes the most sense to me to hear about the limitless nature of God's gift of grace. That "*much more surely*" phrase is repeated in this passage. With God, with Christ, it is always much more surely that we are given!

"One man" is another phrase Paul repeats here. He says if one man's actions leads to death, so also one man's righteousness leads to life. Obviously he's

speaking of Adam and Christ, but I think we can also apply this to ourselves: one person's actions can have significant impact, for bad or for good. We can control what kind of actions we want to share with the world: what results do you want your influential behaviour to have?

Matthew 4:1-11:

Good to compare this passage with Luke and Mark's version of the temptation - Matthew has some different order to the trials, and he also fleshes out some of the scriptures that are quoted. You can decide if the differences are significant!

Jesus is tempted by the devil. It's easy to get caught up in an argument about who the devil is, if the devil exists, if the devil is a being, etc. But I think if we get stuck in that argument, we miss the actual point of the story. Point is, Jesus went through a time of testing and tempting and trial before he began his ministry. Point is, Jesus could have chosen many paths of action that would have left him better off, but instead he chose God's path. Point is, Jesus, a human, faced the same tough decisions we face, and remained faithful - so, so can we.

Jesus is tempted in three ways: in the first, he resisted using his powers to meet his own needs. In the second, he resists putting God to the test, demanding of God to meet his needs. In the third, he resists using his power to be a dynamic leader of the type that seeks fame and glory.

It's interesting - the devil tempts Christ by using the scripture from Psalms. He takes the words of the Holy Book and twists them into a wrong meaning. It's not just bad theology when we do the same things with "proof-texting" and other abuses of God's Holy Word - it's actually evil when we use the word in this way! *By Beth Quick*

LECTIONARY NOTES 2

REFLECTIONS ON THEME:

It is a simple and basic message that the Lectionary offers this week. We are all tempted to go our own way, to ignore God's guidance and direction and to hide our sin and brokenness when we fail. But, God's gracious and extravagant offer is forgiveness and right relationship with God, guidance and a pathway to life, if we will only confess our shortcomings and receive God's restoration, and then follow God's ways. The three sins which have always afflicted human beings – greed for wealth, lust for power and unlimited

satisfaction of our appetites (money, power & sex) - also afflicted Christ, and in his overcoming, we find inspiration and guidance for our own lives. The challenge, in today's world of unconditional acceptance, is to have the courage and integrity to acknowledge our brokenness and destructiveness, and admit that we need both forgiveness and empowerment to become creative, contributing human beings who embody God's reign.

CONNECTING WITH LIFE:

GLOBAL APPLICATION: The world – both the planet itself, and the people who live on it – suffer because of humanity's inability to control our basic sinfulness. Our appetites have grown addictive and demand immediate satisfaction, leading to world of exploitation, human trafficking and epidemics of obesity and sexual brokenness. Our greed for wealth and all that it brings has become immense and widespread, leading to a shortage of resources for some, unhealthy dependence on fossil fuels, climate change and devastation of natural resources and many species, while also leaving many people with desperate need as they are paid unfairly, or subject to unjust trade restrictions. Our desire for power and fame has led to a world of celebrity voyeurism, dissatisfaction with quiet and gentle living, and an increasing sense of powerlessness among those who are unable to reach the heights of fame that our world seems to demand. The call of the wilderness, and of Jesus' example of facing temptation and overcoming it, is a challenging lesson for our world. Justice can only be done as we learn to live lives of discipline and simplicity, of consideration and sharing, of prayer and service. Global movements that call us to a different way of living are deserving of our support, and it is up to us, through our participation in political process and law-making, and through our own work of advocacy, ethical consumption and Christ-like living, to make a contribution to changing the core values by which our world operates. This will be a wilderness for sure – in many ways life will get more painful and sacrificial before it gets healthier and more comfortable.

LOCAL APPLICATION: Christianity has, unfortunately, become a religion of excess in many ways. Prosperity preaching, alignment with political parties or the arms of government, and spiritualising of our appetites, our greeds and our celebrity culture all add to the brokenness and injustice of our communities, our churches and our families. We desperately need to learn simplicity and generosity – the sharing of our resources, and the reduction of our wants and 'needs' to create an equitable and sustainable world, and reduce disparities in our corner of the planet. We desperately need to learn servanthood and humility – the respect of other, especially those we disagree with or who follow different religions to create a world of peace and to bring the true meaning of the word 'community' back into lived reality in our neighbourhoods. We desperately need to learn self-discipline, moderation

and fidelity – the right channeling of our appetites toward creativity and life-bringing, not exploitation and destruction, if we are to restore health, real relationships and human dignity in our societies. The disciplines of Christ in the wilderness, and of the Lenten season, are just the gift we need to address our own brokenness and addictions, and to make a contribution to healing in our families, our churches and our communities. Acting locally in lives of daily discipline and quiet Christ-likeness can have a communal, and even global, impact. The challenge is to make the sacrifices necessary to live such a life.

COLLECTS OF THE DAY

Collect One

O Lord,
who for our sake didst fast forty days and forty nights;
Give us grace to use such abstinence,
that, our flesh being subdued to the Spirit,
we may ever obey thy godly motions
in righteousness, and true holiness,
to thy honour and glory,
who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, world without end.

Collect Two

Almighty God,
whose Son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in the wilderness,
and was tempted as we are, yet without sin:
Give us grace to discipline ourselves
in obedience to your Spirit;
and, as you know our weakness,
so may we know your power to save;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 1

As Jesus entered the wilderness to be tested by the devil, let us enter this season of Lent to examine our hearts. We pray, "Waiting on you," and respond, "Amen."

Let us pray for the church's witness in the world.

O Holy One, you have strengthened your church as a sign of your compassion and holiness. Direct us in this calling so that all who look on the church may catch sight of your greater goodness. We pray, waiting on you, **Amen.**

Let us pray for those who govern our country. Sovereign God, you reveal your power on the side of the weak and disenfranchised. Help our leaders, that among the many voices calling for their attention, they might hear the voice of those who do not have the means to provide for themselves: children, the unemployed, and those who need medical or psychological care. We pray, waiting on you, **Amen.**

Let us pray for those who do not have enough to eat. Gracious God, you desire equally that all might know you and that all may eat their fill. Be with the hungry, we pray, that in addition to your word they might have daily bread. We pray, waiting on you, **Amen.**

Let us pray for the youth in our congregation. O God, you know what it is to be tested. We seek your presence with the youth of our parish, that amidst the tempting choices that face them, they may choose to follow you. We pray, waiting on you, **Amen.**

Let us pray for all preparing for baptism. Faithful God, empower your servants _____, that in their own forty days of preparation they may follow the example of Christ and face that which would most keep them from your kingdom. We pray, waiting on you, **Amen.**

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 2

The bidding today is LORD OF LENT and the response is RENEW OUR LIVES

Let us pray.

Followers of the way of Christ, let us bring to the Lord the needs of our times.

Lord Jesus, you called us to renounce evil and we remember today that, at the start of your ministry, you were tried and tempted by the forces of evil. You resisted the chance to be popular instead of faithful;

to choose fame instead of service and power instead of sacrifice - but you set us all an example to follow by choosing the way of the Father.

Teach us how to recognise the approach of evil in all its forms and to be on our guard against it. You faced temptation in your life and because of this may we never be ashamed of temptation in our own lives - but save us from the weakness that gives way to it. Grant us all the strength to stand up against all that is evil and keep us firm in times of trial and temptation knowing that your support and love are always close at hand.

Make us resolute in obeying your will and seeking your kingdom that we may stay true to you and proclaim your salvation.

Lord of Lent

Renew Our Lives

Lord Jesus, we pray for your blessing on all who confess belief in you that they may witness powerfully to your unselfish love and humility. We offer you our thanks that we can meet together in this church and pray openly to you. We remember and pray for those who are denied this opportunity and are persecuted for their faith. We pray for all Christians wherever they may be and may they be strengthened by the power of your love.

Help each one of us to see our priorities and not be led astray, Too often we fail to live up to our ideals; we compromise for comfort; we become too concerned about material things and seek our own glory. We fail to put our trust in you, trusting only in our own schemes and plans. During this time of Lent help us more clearly to see the ways by which we follow you and as we come to you for refreshment and renewal help us to forget ourselves and find true happiness in serving you. As we re examine our lives through self discipline and prayer may we enter your stillness, be sensitive to your call and know your will for us.

Lord of Lent

Renew Our Lives

Lord Jesus, we pray for all people who hold positions of authority that they do not misuse their power to the detriment of those they are supposed to be helping. We pray for all the world's leaders and for our own leaders who are responsible for making decisions about our future. We pray that they will be given the insight and integrity to govern wisely according to your will, being fully aware of the true needs of the people.

Lord Jesus, look with compassion on all those whose minds are full of anxiety and bewilderment and for whom everyday is one of despair. We pray for

those who are experiencing severe financial difficulty at this time; many elderly people and young families trying to exist on very limited incomes: those people faced with losing their homes and those who have lost their jobs. We pray that you will turn their despair to hope and free them from fear and self hatred. Whatever the future may bring them, may they know that you are the rock on whom they depend and that your love will help to ease their burden.

Lord of Lent

Renew Our Lives

We pray for all people everywhere in their varying needs. Into the gentleness of your healing love we bring before you the lonely, the hungry, those living in poverty and those without hope. We remember all those who are ill and in pain: those recovering from surgery - giving thanks for the work and dedication of our doctors and nurses: for those involved in crippling accidents. Today we pray for the victims, their families and the survivors of the Amsterdam plane crash and we offer our thanks for the work of the emergency services throughout the world.

We have in our hearts some people known only to ourselves, some known to our church and some only through the news who are in need of our prayers and we remember them in a moment of quiet.....

May your healing touch support and strengthen them and we pray that you will remove from them all that hurts, harms and hinders.

Lord of Lent

Renew Our Lives

Lord Jesus, we pray that you will bless and protect our homes, our families and our friends. Help us to build bridges of tolerance and understanding between the different generations. May our homes be havens of peace and rest – a place to call our own and a community in which we can feel safe and secure.

Help us to be mindful of those who have no homes, families or friends. Make us grateful for all that we have so that we may use every endeavour to ensure that every person has a home to call his own and feels wanted within his own community.

We pray for the children and young people connected to our church through the various groups and especially for those who are beginning to sense the wonder, mysteries and difficulties of life. We ask that you will hold them in your love. May they, through the good influence of parents, families and the church, grow into a fuller understanding of your love and purpose. Help each

one of us to respond to their needs. Give us patience and compassion, and help us to offer them our time and our experience with true sincerity and love.

Lord of Lent

Renew Our Lives

We pray for all those who are mourning the loss of loved ones that you will comfort and strengthen them in their time of need.

Jesus Christ is the light of the world, a light which no darkness can quench. We remember before God all those who have died and light a candle to symbolise the light of Christ, which eternally shines and brings hope. This morning we pray for and remember.....

Confident in the promise that those who believe in you will live though they have died, we give you thanks for all who have left their earthly body and now share with you the joys of heaven.

Lord of Lent

Renew Our Lives

Be with us Lord as we go out in your name:

may the lips that have sung your praises always speak the truth;

may the ears which have heard your word listen only to what is good

And may our lives as well as our worship be always pleasing to you.

Merciful Father accept these prayers for the sake of your son, Our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

By Margaret Appleton - From This is Church.com

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 3

Lord God on this first Sunday in Lent, we remember the trials and temptations of your son Jesus Christ in his journey through the wilderness, and how he triumphed over all.

In our prayers we think of the difficult journeys in life encountered by so many people in the world.

We pray that in their different times of need, they may find discernment to see their way ahead, and strength to overcome whatever problems they face.

We pray that faith may be deepened in this period of Lent, and all may walk in the light of the Lord.

Lord in your mercy - **hear our prayer**

We pray for the Church, of which we are members, and thank you for the light it provides for our journeys ahead.

We pray for those who lead us in our worship, and for all those who enable others to know that light in their lives.

We pray for each other, that we may each respond to the challenges that the time of Lent presents to us.

Help us to be able to look at ourselves, and to recognise our failings, our inadequacies, and the need for your presence in our journey of life.

We pray for the family of the Church. when we receive the bread and wine at our communion today may we experience a sense of belonging to you and to each other.

Bind us together, Lord, as a family, so that we can travel along life's journey helping and supporting one another, overcoming together all the trials and temptations which confront us daily

Lord in your mercy - **hear our prayer**

Lord God we think of the troubled parts of the world, where there is so much suffering, where darkness prevails and where the light of the Lord seems so far away.

We pray for people whose humanity is denied by others

- for those without homes and food
- for those suffering from malnutrition, illness and disease
- for those living in fear of the war and conflict

We remember especially the people living in Syria, in Afghanistan; and those in other parts of the world where there is unrest

We pray for all those working for peace and justice, for our armed forces

We ask that they may all be sustained and encouraged in their difficult work in what must seem an endless journey and may they know the light of the Lord in everything they do in the name of peace.

Lord in your mercy - **hear our prayer**

Lord God we thank you for our neighbours, our friends and for the people around us with whom we work and share our daily lives. We thank you, for all the joys and blessings of family life. forgive us when we quarrel and make us always ready to forgive one another.

We pray for those who are old and lonely, those isolated because of ill-health, and those who find it difficult to make friends or be accepted. Show us all what we can do to help, and teach us to be good neighbours and true friends.

We thank you Lord for your miracles of healing, and we pray for all who administer to the sick and infirm.

We bring before you in a moment of quietness those we know or love who are ill or in special need at this time, and we name them in our hearts

We pray that your blessing be upon them and those who love and care for them and we pray that they may find encouragement and peace, that their sorrows and concerns be transformed into comfort, and their loneliness into fellowship with you.

Lord in your mercy - **hear our prayer**

We pray for those all those who mourn and for those who still miss the companionship and care of loved ones.

We pray that as they journey in this part of their life, that the challenges of Lent and the assurances of Easter will bring to them new strength and new purpose.

Jesus Christ is the Light of the World, a light which no darkness can quench.

We remember before God those who have died and light a candle to symbolise the light of Christ which eternally shines and brings hope.

Today we remember especially

You turn our darkness into light, in your light shall we see light.

Lord in your mercy - **hear our prayer**

Lord God our Father as we go out into the world today we remember that you son was tempted by the forces of evil but chose faithfulness rather than popularity, service instead of fame, sacrifice instead of power..

These temptations still come to us Lord and we are far weaker and so we pray for the strength to shun them as he did so that we may be of use to God and to man.

Merciful father accept these prayers for the sake of your son our Saviour Jesus Christ Amen

We will now sing together the Lord's prayer

POST COMMUNION

Lord God,
you renew us with the living bread from heaven.
Nourish our faith,
increase our hope,
strengthen our love,

and enable us to live by every word
that proceeds from out of your mouth;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS

Almighty God,
whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit
to be tempted by Satan;
Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations;
and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us,
let each one find you mighty to save;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.
1979 Book of Common Prayer

Father,
through our observance of Lent,
help us to understand the meaning
of Your Son's death and resurrection,
and teach us to reflect it in our lives.
Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son.
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
International Committee on English in the Liturgy (ICEL)

God of love, you gave your son Jesus strength in the desert. Grant that we
may also have the strength to do what is right and to stand up for what we
believe in, even when we are tempted by others or by what we see around us
to do wrong. Amen. *Cafod*

Christ Jesus, you fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. Help us to take only what
we need and to say no when we are tempted by new things and more things,
so that around the world everyone can have an equal share of what God has
given us. Amen. *Cafod*

God of wilderness and water,
your Son was baptized and tempted as we are.
Guide us through this season,
that we may not avoid struggle,
but open ourselves to blessing,
through the cleansing depths of repentance
and the heaven-rending words of the Spirit. Amen.

Artist of souls,
you sculpted a people for yourself
out of the rocks of wilderness and fasting.
Help us as we take up your invitation to prayer and simplicity,
that the discipline of these forty days
may sharpen our hunger for the feast of your holy friendship,
and whet our thirst for the living water you offer
through Jesus Christ. Amen.

God of the covenant,
in the glory of the cross
your Son embraced the power of death
and broke its hold over your people.
In this time of repentance,
draw all people to yourself,
that we who confess Jesus as Lord
may put aside the deeds of death
and accept the life of your kingdom. Amen.

God of the living,
through baptism we pass from the shadow of death
to the light of the resurrection.
Remain with us and give us hope
that, rejoicing in the gift of the Spirit
who gives life to our mortal flesh,
we may be clothed with the garment of immortality,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Beloved friends, in this season of repentance and healing,
we accept God's invitation to be ever-mindful of the needs of others,
offering our prayers on behalf of God's community in the church and the
world.

Fill us with your strength
to resist the seductions of our foolish desires
and the tempter's vain delights,
that we may walk in obedience and righteousness,
rejoicing in you with an upright heart. Amen.

God of mercy,
your word was the sure defence of Jesus in his time of testing.
Minister to us in the wilderness of our temptation,

that we who have been set free from sin by Christ may serve you well into life everlasting. Amen.

SERMON OUTLINE

Matt 4:1-11 into the desert...

Jesus was *led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil - fasted 40 days/nights – a tough/testing time..*

a) physically: *The hills are like dust heaps, the limestone is blistered & peeling, the rocks are bare & ragged.. It glows & shimmers with heat like some vast furnace - unbearable!* **b) spiritually** - at his weakest ebb was *tempted by the devil..*

Jesus is tempted to misuse his power – to use it:-

1. Selfishly:- *if you are the Son of God tell these stones to become bread - put your own needs first. But J came to bring blessing to others - the spiritually hungry - who hunger & thirst after righteousness. Jesus responds by quoting Deut 18.3:- It is written, Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God - a referring to the time when God fed the Israelites with manna. They had to learn to trust Him! So too we must feed on Him...*

2. Spectacularly:- *the highest point of the temple.. If you are the Son of God throw yourself down - 450ft drop to the valley - angels would save him (Psalm 91.11) - crowds would flock to see such a sensation! But J replies Do not put the Lord your God to the test - (Deut 6.16) ref to the Jews in the desert demanding a sign of God's presence (Ex.17). Live trustingly!*

1. Sinfully:- *a very high mountain - was offered all the kingdoms of the world & their splendour - bow down & worship me.. But J had come to save the world by God's plan - the way of the **cross** - not **compromise!** J replies: *Worship the Lord your God & serve him only (Deut 6.13)**

We too face temptation daily & must fight the tempter - by **listening carefully to God's precepts & living consciously in God's presence....** *By Norman Porteus*

SERMON

“Temptation” is a word that has absented itself from this culture’s vocabulary and thinking. It’s so much easier to just give into it.

“Temptation” is a word that has absented itself from this culture’s vocabulary and thinking. It’s so much easier to just give into it. “Save us from the time of trial,” the modern version of the Lord’s Prayer has substituted in place of “Lead us not into temptation.” But everything in the current culture points to permission to enter into temptation immediately, without any hesitation, at times with admiration; there is a tendency, especially among the young, to make bitter fun of those who resist temptation. This is the environment that surrounds the Christian who is urged not to yield to temptation.

What does it mean to be tempted? It is to be pulled away from our Creator by substituting the temporal for the eternal. We are pulled away from the purpose for which we were created: to live in God, to be one with God, to delight in God, to know the mind of God. Temptation also means to disregard the words and commandments we have been considering during this liturgical season: to ignore the fact that the Beatitudes of Jesus are indeed addressed to us, to forget to walk humbly with our God, to forget to love mercy and to do justice, as the prophet Micah urged us. All temptation centers at keeping us from the observance of these injunctions. And even though we don’t face temptation alone, we still find it easier to simply give in, forgetting the promise in Hebrews 3:18: “Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.”

Today’s gospel report of the temptations of Jesus, testified to by Mathew – and by Mark and Luke in their gospels – is of vital importance to each one of us because it is so much a part of our own experiences.

The first temptation deals with the immediate physical needs of the body – an inescapable reality for all of us. In all ancient cultures the word “bread” stands for all that feeds us physically. It still remains so in the languages of these old cultures as evidence that, in the past, if the harvest of wheat failed, the people died.

It is significant that this particular temptation comes when Jesus is famished and physically at his weakest. The tempter doesn’t say, “All right, I’ll give you bread, but you will have to work for me today.” That would have been a rational request. What makes it temptation is the shortcut to the miraculous: “Use your powers as the Son of God to change these stones into bread.” What is implied is that if it doesn’t work, then he will doubt his relationship to God and also doubt the Godhead.

How many times do we, too, look for shortcuts? “O, God, if this bad government were not in place, then so many people would not suffer from

malnutrition or starvation. Why are you not deposing this dictator in such and such a land? Are you really God?”

Have you not heard people say again and again, “I can’t believe in a God who allows suffering to take place.” All of us fall into that temptation especially in times of disaster. Jesus puts us to shame. Even when his own physical survival is at stake, he clings to the assurance given to his faith ancestors – that we do not live by bread alone; that the word of God, the truth of God, if only we could see it, if only we would acknowledge it, leads us to life! Of course Jesus did know the necessity for human nourishment; otherwise he would not have felt compassion for the poor and hungry. He commands us to feed the hungry. It is the emphasis we put on this temporal body that he warns us against; and how right he is. These days, with gyms and personal trainers everywhere, with the emphasis on a toned body, with surgical interventions to make it perfect, the body has become an idol for millions of people the world over. We have been warned against this kind of idolatry. Not living by bread alone means that we must not give into the temptation of allowing the needs of our bodies to overwhelm our need for the word of God.

The second temptation – the use of scripture in order to put God to the test – is painfully familiar to us, if we only stop to examine our expectations with honesty. The human tendency to bargain with God is quite prominent. We complain, “But Jesus said, ‘Ask and it shall be given, knock and the door will be opened,’ so why doesn’t God give me my heart’s desire? Why doesn’t God answer my prayers? Why doesn’t God punish the evildoers and reward the righteous?”

These are legitimate questions, but they almost always end up in the form of bargaining or testing. “Answer this prayer, God, and I’ll be good forever and ever.” Or “Do what I think is right, God, and I will believe in you.”

Unfortunately, we do not take into account the interconnectedness of creation when we put God to the test. We don’t know the mind of God. We cannot enter into the mind of the Creator who sees and understands the consequences of our requests. What if God answered the prayers of those who want this country destroyed? What if God answered the prayers of so many in our own country who claim the name of Christ and who ask for the destruction of enemies? What would happen to the world? The answer that Jesus gives, He who could have thrown himself from the pinnacle and survived, is that even when we ask for things using the words of scripture, putting God to the test is yielding to the temptation of the easy fix without considering the consequences.

The third temptation is the one that has brought us to the brink of disaster again and again – the terrible, seductive call of power. How easy it would have been for Jesus, weakened from hunger, all alone in the unforgiving desert, to forget to whom he truly belonged. How many human beings can you name who have turned their backs to the terrible seduction of power? Look at the inequality of wealth in our country and the world. Look at people starving while their leaders hold on to power, storing billions in the banks of Switzerland. Oh, the temptation of power that comes with wealth. How well Jesus knew the fatal results of giving in to the worship of other gods – the gods of greed, of luxury, of controlling others. All you have to do, Satan tells him, is forget that you belong to God.

As George McDonald wrote in his sermon "[Kingship](#)," "The one principle of hell is –'I am my own.'"

Jesus rejects this temptation outright. Only God is worthy of our worship, he tells us; only God deserves our service. It is after this firm answer that the devil departs and leaves us alone. "I know that my Redeemer lives," Job cries. "I know in whom I have believed," Paul declares even from prison. Do we know who it is who made us, who loves us, who asks us not to forget that God loves us and will not abandon us in the desert of temptation?

The great secret of the story of temptation in the Garden of Eden is that God did not abandon Adam and Eve. The promise echoing through the centuries since Paul preached it is that even if we fall into the temptation of forgetting God, Grace will not forget us. But oh, the sweetness of knowing how to say no to temptation and yes to God!

— *Katerina Whitley is the author of [Walking the Way of Sorrows](#) (Morehouse, 2003) among other books of Biblical monologues. She lives and writes in Boone, North Carolina.*

ONLINE SERMON SOURCES

Training days - an introduction on Olympic skating leads into the concept that Jesus was training in the wilderness for his ministry and mission. Day 1

http://day1.org/924-training_days

Matthew 4 : 1-11

Sermon outline. 1. Jesus was tempted by the wrong use of power. That was the first temptation. 2. Jesus was also tempted by the wrong way to popularity. That was the second temptation. 3. Finally, Jesus was tempted by the wrong kind of partnership. That was the third temptation.

http://www.sermons.org/sermons/new_testament/matthew/matthew_4_1-11.htm

Basic exegesis and sermon starter which applies the three temptations to pertinent areas of modern church life. The temptation story gives us three insights into the business of serving our Lord.

<http://www.lectionarystudies.com/studyg/lent1ag.html>

The testing grounds of faith - a US Lutheran sermon.

<http://www.predigten.uni-goettingen.de/archiv-7/050213-5-e.html>

Two "Sermons from Seattle". The first can involve the preacher in dressing up and there is a video which shows this sermon being delivered in this way.

http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_a_isadore_isaac_isin.htm

The second is on Satan Sunday. The preacher claims that the first Sunday of Lent is always Satan Sunday in the life of the church.

http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_a_satan_sunday.htm

The Tempter, the tease and the trial - good use of quotations by CS Lewis. Lutheran so its exegetical in part, but well earthed with incidents from everyday life.

http://www.lectionary.org/Sermons/Molin/Matt/Matt%2004.1-11_TempterTease.htm

CHILDREN

[Worshiping with Children](http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2014/02/year-first-sunday-in-lent-march-13-2011.html), Lent 1, Including children in the congregation's worship, using the Revised Common Lectionary,

<http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2014/02/year-first-sunday-in-lent-march-13-2011.html>

["Burying the Alleluia for Lent."](http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2014/01/burying-alleluia-for-lent.html)

<http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2014/01/burying-alleluia-for-lent.html>

Talk - Resisting Satan's temptation. Uses Simple Simon says.

<http://www.sermons4kids.com/who-says.html>

Talk - using a chocolate bar as a 'way into' temptation.

http://www.sermons4kids.com/temptation_of_christ.htm

A Bible story lesson which could provide a talk.

<http://childrenschapel.org/biblestories/temptation.html>

HYMN SUGGESTIONS

[I Know Whom I Have Believed](#)

[I Cannot Tell Why He Whom Angels Worship](#)

[Be Thou My Vision](#)

[Saviour, Like A Shepherd Lead Us](#)

[Heart Word](#)

How Long? [Chord Chart](#); [Mp3 Download](#)

[Thy Word](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

[Blessed Be Your Name](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

[Your Grace Is Enough](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

[Mighty To Save](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

[Change My Heart, O God](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)