

“Temptation”  
Deuteronomy 26:1-11  
Romans 10:8b-13, Luke 4:1-13

Pastor Norman Fowler  
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow  
February 21, 2010

It's a familiar image. There was a student sitting at a desk busily writing away, looking up to see the time. Twenty minutes still to go. It had already seemed like an eternity; 20 more seemed like another eternity. Yet there was also the fear, “Am I going to finish?” I don't know about you, but I've been in some of those circumstances. I'm not in a stage in my life when I would really like to be there again. And yet as I hear this passage I recognize there is at least some invitation to us to recognize our own testing.

There can be a variety of ways a test can be used. One of the ways I most often think about a test is that I've done the preparation and now I need to show that I've learned the material. Perhaps we can see that to some extent with Jesus. However, this is Jesus just beginning to go into his ministry.

There's another way of thinking about tests. Sometimes we take a pre-test to see what we need to learn, and then we can focus on the parts we aren't sure about. I often think that the testing in our lives is that kind of testing, that would help us see where we might have struggles with our life with God.

Whichever way we see a test, it seems that Jesus passes this one. There is something he does in his time in the wilderness in this test that allows him to move forward and into his ministry. I would argue that this test is the beginning of his ministry, at least to us. We see him struggling with the temptation, the testing of the father of lies, the devil, gives in this passage.

One thing I'd like to notice as we begin is that all these questions in a way are the temptation not to trust God. They are the temptation rather to put himself central and to try to find a way around what God wants, or to not even think God matters. It feels to me that this is the temptation of our world. Our world would have us believe that God doesn't matter, or perhaps that there is no God.

And yet I believe we end up needing a God and will make one. I think as we watch what Jesus does with his answers, we see some of our own responses and needs. As in the first one, where the question is, “Why don't you turn these stones into bread. You're hungry, after all.” So is it just a test of whether he can stay hungry? It really goes beyond that, doesn't it? And Jesus notes that in his answer. He says we don't live by bread alone. It is about our sustenance, what sustains us.

Oftentimes I begin to believe it's easy to think I sustain myself. It's like going to the grocery store. I can go in and pick up a gallon of milk, and I've done it. I've gotten what I needed. And yet, if I think about it, which I usually don't, it's more than just being able to get a gallon of milk. That milk came from somewhere. There were a lot of people who put some work in to get that milk to that particular place. There were some cows involved.

In many ways, when we think about our own sustenance, it is a result of something much larger than ourselves. It is the world in which we live, because we have a Sustainer. Even in thinking about our own sustenance, there's an invitation to think beyond what we can do. But Jesus doesn't just stop there. He keeps going and says, "We don't live by bread alone." It is a response that leads us to think beyond ourselves, beyond what we can do. Even in his response to the temptation, he's teaching us. Isn't there always another beyond us?

Sometimes I don't want to acknowledge that other, but there is. We can use that analogy of going into a classroom with the teacher up front. I can go into that classroom and think that I know it all already and that I don't need that teacher up front, but it's generally not the case. Most times when I've gone into a classroom, I end up finding out how much I didn't know before I got there. It's an experience of recognizing that there's more that I don't know, more beyond. That's perhaps what this first question does. It invites us to look beyond.

The second question, while it looks on some level to be about power and authority and fame, I think really pivots around the idea of worship. How would that power and authority come? Through worship of the devil, the father of lies.

What do we worship? I'm not sure that's a question that's presented to us every day. We don't have an advertisement coming on saying, "What will you worship today?" And yet the advertisements, in a way, do encourage us to worship particular things that I don't think are God. What do we worship? As we begin to look beyond and recognize that there's more to life than ourselves, our own sustenance, that there is the other that we need a relationship with.

There are studies that show that if children get the food they need, the shelter they need, but not the love and care they need, there is something that is called the failure to thrive. We need what's beyond and that's what's involved with this idea of worship. We need that relationship with what's beyond us. I believe we will find it one way or another. We will look for it in whatever it might be. Jesus, of course, is inviting us to recognize that it's God, that we need the one other that is the sustainer. But it's sometimes hard. It's being able to sit in front in the classroom and listen, to get into that relationship of learning, that relationship of recognizing who has what we need. It's a recognition of God.

Now the world, I think, continually suggests that's a false teacher. You need to test that teacher. That even God isn't really there. Well, what would you do if you went into the classroom and decided you were going to test the teacher? We can do a little of that ahead of time—ask around a bit, find out what other people thought. In some ways we can do that with our faith, as well. But how do we test the teacher? I was thinking of going into a calculus class and saying, "I need you to tell me what a derivative is." Of course, I haven't learned it yet so I don't really know what it is myself. Or going into a Physics class and saying, "I want to know the theory of relativity." They could tell me anything. Would that really test the teacher?

The true test of the teacher is to see what happens on the other side. But our world suggests we can test the teacher. We can test God because we think we know how the world is supposed to work. It's kind of like going into a calculus class and thinking I know what a derivative is, even though I don't, and thus being able to test the teacher. Why would we think we can test God, who knows the way everything works, which I realize over and over again I really don't. I get a little insight here and there, but not the totality. And why a particular thing happens? I sometimes want to know, but it's pretty clear to me I don't know the full extent of a particular action. There's just no way.

So if God is that teacher, can we test and find out how much God knows? I don't think so. I think what has happened instead is that as we look out and recognize that we need to know the other, that we're aware of the power beyond us, that we can be extremely thankful that that power beyond us, that God we know has sent one to show us the way. Without one who shows us the way, who models the way to God, it would be incredibly hard. Sometimes we do that in classes. We bring in somebody who has been through some of it before, who knows the drill, to help us along. In a way, I think that's what God does with Jesus. I think he does a bit more than that, but he begins to show us the way.

So in these very temptations Jesus goes through, he's encouraging us to think, to feel. What about that other? What is out there? What do I worship? What do I give my confidence to and look for my inspiration from? Do I think I can test God? Now, we are encouraged to call out. As Paul suggests, as we call out we get to enter into that relationship. But it's not that we get to test and to have God fit into what we want God to be.

As we think about looking outward, recognizing the other, we recognize that the next step is worship and service. It's a bit like going to that class. The worship is sitting in class. It's getting into the relationship with the teacher so that we're learning from the teacher. We're present. We allow the inspiration to happen. The service, then, is practicing what we're learning. One of the opportunities we have as we go into Lent is to look outward toward God, and see where God has come toward us in Christ, to recognize that Christ is teaching us about worship and service.

So the invitation I have for you is to sit in worship this week. What I've done in the bulletin this week is given you one way to do that, with a prayer or a way of praying (see page 4). It's a fairly common acronym we use to say a prayer. A.C.T.S.: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication. I've given you some directions on how you can do that. Start out the day with adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication to God –that's worship. It's one form of worship. Then we can spend our day in service. In that way, we see Jesus' very temptations as an invitation to us to enter into our relationship with God starting, perhaps, with, or at least using, worship and service. Amen.

One way of putting a prayer together:

## **ACTS**

**Adoration** – Great and gracious God

**Confession** – Lord, you know my failings, forgive me

**Thanksgiving** – Thank you Lord for your grace. You have shown me your grace in so many ways

**Supplication**- Through your grace, Lord, I bring those in my life who need your help, the ways I need your help, and the ways the world needs your help.

So something like:

Great and gracious God, You know my failings, forgive me, I pray. Thank you, Lord, for your grace. You have shown me your grace in so many ways. Through your grace, Lord, I bring those in my life who need your help. I bring the ways I need your help. I bring the ways the world needs your help. Through Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior, I pray. Amen

Or add specifics:

Great and gracious God, You know how I have sinned. I have \_\_\_\_\_. Please forgive me and help me change my ways. You have shown me your grace. Thank you for \_\_\_\_\_. We need your help, Lord. I would ask that you bring help or healing to \_\_\_\_\_. Through Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior, I pray. Amen