

In the name of ONE God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

We have lots of Sundays during the Church year that have titles; you know, like Pentecost Sunday, Trinity Sunday or Transfiguration Sunday. Well, if this first Sunday of Lent were to get its own name, it would have to be “Temptation Sunday.” On this Sunday, we are four days into our freshly decided upon Lenten disciplines, and now we get the Genesis story of Adam and Eve and the serpent, along with Jesus’ time in the wilderness. Today there is temptation all around us, and you know what Oscar Wilde said, “I can resist anything, except temptation.”

The story of the First Couple and the snake in the Garden is one of those that we all know and remember from Sunday school. But, do we *really* know this story? For instance, how many of us believe that the fruit that was bitten was an apple? Well ... nowhere in the story does it say that. It was a piece of fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And as one writer said, “The fruit on that tree probably tasted better than the fruit of all the other trees combined. It probably tasted like a cross between fresh pineapple and ripe cherries<sup>1</sup>.” But because some Renaissance painter took the liberty of making the fruit an apple, we now “*know*” the story that way.

And what about the underlying “fault” in this story? Isn’t this story *really* about the fact that women are the cause of all the sin in the world? I mean, isn’t that the real message of the story – if only Eve hadn’t been tricked by Satan, we would still live in the Garden of Eden? As much as we men would like to believe it’s so, the answer is a resounding NO! That’s not the point, at all. And parenthetically, there is nothing in the story that says the serpent was Satan. Satan doesn’t really enter the Biblical narrative for 16 more books – Job is the first *real* mention of Satan. This is a crafty serpent, a tempter – it doesn’t have to be evil, only tempting. But more importantly, it really didn’t matter which one –

---

<sup>1</sup> Speaking of Sin, by Barbara Brown Taylor, p43.

Adam or Eve – took the first bite of the fruit. The point is, neither one of them was able to resist temptation. And the temptation wasn't to eat something forbidden, or even to disobey God's rules, instead, they were tempted to want to *be* God (or at least *like* God).

Ultimately Adam and Eve were ejected from the Garden, but that doesn't mean that we would still be living in paradise if not for them. There is little doubt that even if it hadn't been the first family, someone, somewhere would have gotten us kicked out long before now, because human nature is to fail at resisting temptation, especially the temptation to be God.

When we think of temptation during this Lenten season, we generally think of those things we have sworn off of, and how many of them seem to be around us, tempting us to break our brand new vows. Have you given up chocolate? That's all that's advertised on TV, isn't it? And everywhere you go, you can smell chocolate. It's tempting to give in, just for one candy bar. Or have you given up alcohol? Suddenly, people you haven't seen for months are calling you up to invite you out for a beer. Of course these perceptions are not really accurate. It's just that we become fixated on that which we cannot have – making it very difficult to stay away from temptation. But these are not really temptations at all – not ones of any great significance anyway. No, the temptations that are important are Adam and Eve's – and Jesus'.

Jesus had gone forty days without food when the tempter came to Him. Matthew tells us He was famished. No kidding! I'd be dead, or at least hallucinating. I have a tough time going from sunrise to sunset without food. So, Jesus is starving when the tempter appears and says, "if you're hungry, turn a rock into bread – that's a snap for the Son of God." But this isn't about hunger, it's about whether Jesus is going to trust God, or co-opt God's power and change the nature of a rock for His own purposes. So Jesus resists temptation and moves on – still weak and hungry, but trusting God.

Next, the tempter says, “Hey. If you want to really impress people, jump off the top of the Temple. The angels will float you safely to the ground – if you are who you think you are.” Jesus was tempted by this to use His God-given power to put on a show and to make people believe that He was supernatural. And again, parenthetically, note that Satan quotes Scripture to Jesus when he tempts Him. Think about that the next time some Bible bashing preacher tries to tell you he knows more Scripture than you and is therefore better. Anyway, in essence, Satan says, “I know God’s Word too and in Psalm 91 it says the angels will guard you.” Again Jesus resists temptation by trusting God’s real providence, not trusting that God will allow Him to do party tricks, saying, “No. I don’t think it’s wise to put God to the test.”

And then finally, the tempter offers Jesus the whole world to rule and to have it worship Him. This was the obvious temptation for Jesus to take all of God’s power and God’s place in the world. Of course, Satan doesn’t really have the ability to make this offer to Jesus because the world and all that is in it belongs to God, and Jesus knows and trusts that. So Jesus tells the tempter, “Take a hike. We’re all called to worship God, not this man you see before you, and certainly not you.”

These stories are meant to tell us that it is in our human nature to want to be God. Adam and Eve were promised that they would be like God if only they would eat from the same tree God ate from; and Jesus was promised all of the attributes of God – ability to change nature to suit His own purposes; angels to serve Him; and the adoration of the world – if only they would allow themselves to take God’s place. But you know what? Jesus was right to trust God. We are all called to worship God, and only God – and for that I give thanks, and heave a sigh of relief.

Have you ever taken responsibility for some big project, something that had a lot of people’s hopes riding on it? And have you stayed awake at night, worrying about whether or not all the details are handled? Have you neglected family or friends while you agonized and fretted over the minutiae of

your project? That's trying to be the God of your life. Anytime we take that amount of control, we are trying to exercise the power of God in our own lives.

You see, we don't really want to be God – not really. We wouldn't want to hear billions of prayers all the time, or have to listen to people whine about things not being perfect in their lives. No, what we want is to be God of *our* lives. We want absolute power over the things around *us*. We want to be able to make it rain when we're hot, and make it stop when we have a barbeque planned. But mostly, we want everything to go *right* in our lives – we want smart, well behaved children; lots of money; perfect teeth and small hips – or six pack abs (depending on your gender). But we KNOW that we can't have those things, so we try to take hold of all the little details we can, in order to have a sense of control, no matter how illusory that sense may be.

What tempts you to try to be God? Is it the desire to change the choices that your spouse or children make? How about the need to have everyone else think the way you do? Or perhaps you're tempted by the one that gets more people than any other – the need to be perfect. Do these sound familiar to you?

If I don't do it, it won't get done right.

I know it's taking too long, but if I just work on it for a little while more, I can make it so much better.

If everybody would just pay attention to me and do it my way, things would turn out the way they should.

Recognize any of those? They're all about trying to be God – trying to control all things in your world so that everything can turn out in your image. That's the greatest temptation of all. But we *cannot* be God – we don't have God's power, or ability, or even God's sense of humor, so instead, we end up being pains in someone else's neck rather than being Godly.

Instead of seeking after perfection; instead of trying to get everyone around us to be like us; this Lent, why don't we take a real, honest look at ourselves, and try to change *ourselves* to be more like Christ. When we're tempted to judge someone else, or to try to keep a tight hold on all of the details of things; why don't we try to recognize that God is God and we're not, and trust in God's grace and providence. As it says in this morning's Collect, we should ask God to: come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as God know(s) our weaknesses, let each one find God mighty to save. Amen.