

Epworth Chapel on the Green  
March 10, 2019  
First Sunday in Lent  
The Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Deuteronomy 26:1-11  
Psalm 91:9-16  
Romans 10:5-13  
Luke 4:1-13

On Ash Wednesday, we observed from the prophet Joel that the Lenten season begins *publicly*, with a call to corporate repentance, prayer, and deepening conversion.

But the Gospel lesson for Ash Wednesday from Matthew has Jesus teaching and enjoining spiritual disciplines that are to be practiced quietly and without pretense. These disciplines have a markedly *personal* character to them.

This morning I want to show how the disciplines of fasting, almsgiving, and prayer that we heard about on Ash Wednesday are directly related to the testing of Jesus in our Gospel lesson today.

In order for us to understand better what is happening to Jesus here in chapter four, we need to go back to the end of chapter three. Chapter three is Luke's version of Jesus' genealogy. And Luke records Jesus' genealogy differently than Matthew.

Matthew begins with Abraham and David and works *forward* to Joseph. The last words of his genealogy are: "Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ" (Mt. 1:16).

Luke doesn't follow Matthew. Instead, Luke begins with Joseph and works *backward* all the way to *Adam*. So the last word in Luke's genealogy of Jesus is: "the son of Adam, the Son of God" (Luke 3:38).

Now we might wonder: Why does Luke write Jesus' genealogy this way, working *backward* from Jesus and ending with Adam? The answer comes in our Gospel lesson this morning. Luke has just ended chapter three by saying, "Jesus is the son of *Adam*." And he now continues by saying that Jesus is led to the desert to be tempted by Satan.

**What Luke wants to show us is that Jesus is a *new Adam*, who overcomes temptation and obeys the will of God at every point where the first Adam failed.**

But in addition to recalling Adam's temptation, our Gospel lesson also recounts the children of Israel and their desert experience after they left Egypt.

All three – Adam, Israel, and Jesus – are tested. The children of Israel passed through the waters of the Red Sea and were then tested for forty *years* in the desert (Numbers 14:33-34; Deut. 8:2). Israel, like Adam, failed the test.

Jesus, as the *new Adam*, not only recalls the testing of Adam, but also recalls the testing of the children of Israel. Having come through the waters of baptism, he now enters into the desert for forty *days*. And the temptations over which Jesus is successful echo the three *failures* of the children of Israel.

The first failure was when the children of Israel gave in to their craving for food (Ex. 16:3; Psalm 106:14).

The second was when they forgot the God who had saved them and practiced idolatry, worshiping a golden calf (Ex. 32:1-6; Ps. 106:21).

The third failure was when the children of Israel “tested” God in the wilderness at Rephidim, and doubted whether God was still present with them (Ex. 17:7; Ps. 95:9).

Jesus’ temptations here in Luke’s Gospel have been compared to the three temptations we are warned about in I John 2:16. John refers to these as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. These correspond to the original temptations in Genesis.

And the antidote to these temptations involves the three spiritual disciplines offered to us in Lent: fasting, almsgiving, and prayer. These become a regimen for spiritual training and a means of God’s grace in us.

We do battle against our disordered desire for bodily pleasure by denying ourselves food. By fasting and other acts of self-denial, we learn self-control.

We do battle against our disordered attachment to material things by giving them away. By giving alms, we practice detachment from those things and avoid creating false needs for ourselves.

And we do battle against pride by humbling ourselves before God in prayer.

By prayer, and using the Scriptures as Jesus did, we humble ourselves before God, relying completely on his grace.

Jesus, as the *new* Adam, overcame the temptations that conquered Adam. And he overcame the temptations that hampered the children of Israel on their way to the Promised Land. And on our forty day journey through Lent, he offers us grace, through these spiritual disciplines, to overcome the temptations that are common to all of us. He offers us grace so that we might prevail, with him, over the forces of evil that surround us and seek to destroy us.

As we come to the Lord's Table, I encourage you to avail yourselves of the grace he offers to us during this season of Lent. That grace is freely available to us as we recapitulate his forty days in the desert through our own forty days of Lent. And it is available to us this morning in these gifts of bread and wine.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.