

TEMPATION

The passages for Lent, this year, are not as gloomy or somber as normally is the case. Throughout the Sundays of Lent, we will encounter and witness God through fascinating and amazing Biblical stories.

Today, will not be an exception, even though it is the first Sunday, which always presents the topic of Temptation.

Temptation is the pull / the draw to make a choice that will take us down a path that is destructive or counter to our higher thinking.

Yielding to temptation can hamper growth and wholeness, if that negative choice hurts our relationship with God, then it is a SIN.

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Temptation is an astonishing thing....because we are not tempted by concepts of evil and destruction. We are usually tempted to do something that "appears" satisfying and desirable. It is often a rationalization.

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Hitler never invited the German people on a trip to ruthless conquest and to the nadir of despair. NO, he talked about pride, self-sufficiency, hard work and entitled destiny. Many of the German soldiers thought that they were defending God when they brutally assaulted the "atheistic" Soviet Union.

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Likewise, corporate executives never promote putting their workers, customers or the environment at risk. Instead, they talk about the potential of wealth, ease and satisfaction.

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We are tempted into evil and destruction with the deception that the temptation is actually good and beneficial.

That may not surprise you, but the extreme difficulty in discerning and overcoming temptation may astonish you.....because resisting is almost impossible,...unless..... Unless we are forewarned or experienced.

To the naive and uniformed, the first exposure to a temptation is often overwhelming.

It can be overwhelming because the choice has a degree of desirability.

\*We can't be tempted by something we are not the least bit interested in.

No matter how persuasive or lucrative the offer, I could never be tempted to sky dive. There is just No way.

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For Temptation to be temptation there has to be a significant possibility that we will give in to the allure.

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On the surface, both of today's passages deal with temptation, but there is also much more being presented.

We are very familiar with the story of Jesus' temptation, and how he remained faithful to God. Jesus did NOT yield to the seduction, and keep in mind,.....Jesus was tempted. There was a part of him that wanted to indulge in the options presented, and the temptations were VERY deceptive and ENTICING.

*Would it have been so wrong to turn stones into bread?  
One or two wouldn't have hurt,.....and nobody was around to witness it, either. ????  
And, consider if millions of stones were turned into bread.  
It would mean the end of world hunger!!*

For a hungry and compassionate social worker like Jesus was, turning stones to bread would have been a very tempting thing to do.

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Nevertheless, there are some deeper lessons here. First and foremost is: Does Jesus follow and obey God,.....or other influences?

Also, feeding the hungry does not address the exploiters and tyrants who cause people to be poor and hungry.

And, >>The End Does NOT justify the means.

The End Does NOT justify the means.

The journey / the little choices along the way are more important.

To be sure, discerning God's will can be quite a conundrum.

It is a process / a progression of small, incremental decisions.

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The other temptation themed narrative is in the second creation story.

Actually, it's the first creation story because it is older than the 7 day story.

The Garden of Eden story is much older, and was likely told around camp fires for generations, until it was finally written down.

The creation stories are to bring enlightenment. There are not so much about "how" things began, but rather "why" and why things are the way they are.

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Here is a capsulated version of the Adam and Eve temptation:

When God discovered that someone had eaten of the forbidden fruit, God asked Adam, "Who did this?"

Adam pointed to Eve and said, "The woman gave me the fruit and I ate it, not knowing what it was."

God looked towards Eve, with a raised eyebrow, waiting for an explanation.

Eve quavered and pointed at the serpent saying, "It was that snake who said I should eat the fruit."

The baleful glare of the Almighty fell upon the snake, but the poor reptile stayed silent.....for he didn't have a leg to stand on. :)

On the other hand, the problem wasn't the red apple in the tree, but the green pair on the ground. :)

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Well, the story is not quite that simple or straightforward as we may think,..... and the Bible does Not say the fruit was an apple, either.

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I tend to agree with Rabbi Harold Kushner's explanation in his book, "How Good do we have to be". Kushner suggests that the story of Adam and Eve can be an inspiring, even liberating story, a story of what a wonderful, complicated, painful and rewarding thing it is to be a human being."

He states that the Adam and Eve narrative is Not a story of Paradise lost, but of Paradise Outgrown; it's not about original sin, but of the birth of conscience.

Also, Kushner describes Eve as someone "terribly brave" for boldly crossing the boundary line into the unknown.

The Adam and Eve story is about growing up; it is about making choices and learning and living with those consequences.

And,... the story contains humour too,....."taking snakes" for example.

The Adam and Eve narrative is about life.

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As you contemplate the story, imagine God as a parent, caring and trying to protect his children.

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More on the story:

God provided a wonderful home for Adam and Eve; all their needs were met. They had choice, too, for God told Adam that there was one fruit from a tree that he should not eat. Adam was warned that if he indulged of that fruit, then he would surely die.

God didn't say that God would kill Adam; he just warned him of the consequences.

True enough: Death is the end of our human means, but note, dying is Not a crime.

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Also Note, God prepared / warned Adam, and indirectly, Eve.

The Snake:..... is just a lame excuse, like saying, "the Dog ate my homework."

Eve and Adam had the desire to experience that fruit, and that slithering craving got the best of them.

They were hoping to find the quick and easy path to wisdom, as if the fruit was a magic pill.

*When you were in school, did ever wish there was machine that would instantly implant knowledge into your head? <*

There are no pills that make us wise, and no pills that take the hurt away; they only mask the pain.

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Adam and Eve came to learn that the journey of life with God would continue, albeit different,...and with more temptation to come, too.

Although, I bet they learned to listen better / to heed God's warnings, and perhaps make wiser choices in the future.

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They did make a bad choice, but it was Not the end.

Maybe the end of innocence, but not the end of life.

I'm more inclined to think that the Adam and Eve story is about "original" awareness,... and not about original sin.

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All good parents try to protect their children; they try to keep them safe, but there comes a point where the child grows up and ventures beyond the parent's reach,..... and mistakes will be made.

And, as it happened in Eden, temptation came calling and temptation was sly and deceiving; it was as tricky as a snake. It had to be... because Adam and Eve had little to gain by yielding, and seemingly everything to lose,... but the lure to sample the enticement was too strong.

The snake was NOT the devil. It was just the embodiment of temptation. I could say, "Hockey Night in Canada is a snake", and you'd laugh, unless I was referring to Don Cherry.

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The temptation / the snake was cunning with its tricky and deceptive questions, such as: "Did God really say you were not to eat of that fruit?".....and....."Oh, you won't really die. In fact, eating of the fruit is really a good thing, it will open your horizons and you will be like God,..... and being like God surely isn't bad is it...???

And it happened,..... and their eyes were opened. They saw things they never had seen before, ..... and there were denials, lies and finger pointing,..... and ...they discovered the by-product: Shame.

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God was right. In a way, we do die...just a little. Shame does that to use. Shame is a killer. Shame drove a wedge in their relationship with God, ... but they lived on. God did Not give up on them.

They were compelled to leave home, yet God still provided for them without infringing on the consequences of their choice.

They would Not starve. Their relationship would carry on, and they would continue to live, be fruitful and multiply.

Their life continued, but was severely altered by their experience and by their shame.

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This is a good lesson for parents and everyone.

We must equip and warn the naive and inexperienced, yet we can NOT guarantee that our children / that the innocent will make only good choices.

We can not guarantee their safety and wellbeing,..... BUT we can forgive **and** commit ourselves to continue the journey with them, and always offer help along the way.

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We humans are tempted to judge / to devalue those who give into temptation.

However, our character is more determined by how we learn and love, and not so much by our choices. Our choices affect the quality of our journey and future choices.

I met lots of beautiful and inspiring people who struggled greatly with saying no to temptations.

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We must try not to belittle or discard those who fail at making virtuous decisions. Yielding is not necessarily a sign of weakness.

Ignorance, fear and a deep sense of aloneness open wide the door to following the call of the snake.

Ignorance, fear and aloneness.

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So, let us be prepared, ... and let us prepare others, especially the young and naive.

Life is not simple, and there are no talking snakes to trample on.

We must teach our children well,..... and gently expose them to life, too. Tell them about the forbidden fruit.

We must take away the fear, and that begins by taking away the shame. There is forgiveness; all can be forgiven, and forgiveness draws all of us into wholeness.

There is less fear when we are together, including with God.

And, when we are graciously welcoming each other through forgiveness,.....there will be less aloneness.

Yet, community is not enough. As God did for Jesus at his baptism and at the transfiguration, we must praise and claim our children.

"This is my son in whom I am well pleased."

Lifting up and declaring the loving bond is a powerful way to equip our children and the weak to endure pending temptations.

And, temptations will happen.

Take away the ignorance, the fear and the loneliness.

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AND, rising up from these passages / lifting up from these two stories is God calling to you and me.

God is calling, "There is no shame in learning hard lessons"

God is calling, "I'm with you. I still believe in you and love you."

There is a better way to live / a better path to journey down.

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This is our invitation to encounter God's grace and to witness a life of hope in better choices.

We are God's children,..... and that is a good place to start from now.