

**Romans 5:16-19**

And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgement following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

**Matthew 4:1-11**

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

## Sermon

You have heard the hypothetical question before, “If you could have dinner with anyone through out all of history, who would you invite to dinner and why?” And you probably know the answers that are most often given, family members who have passed away, significant leaders in different fields of interest for the person answering. And almost always, someone will include Jesus. We want to know who he is, what he looks like, what he sounds like. We have questions that we want to ask him and we hope for answers for things we don’t even have questions for.

During the season of Lent, we are going to spend some time looking at many of the people who encountered Jesus, asking ourselves how did they meet him, what agenda did they have, and how did Jesus respond to them. All throughout, I hope that we will keep in mind our our meeting with Jesus, that hypothetical dinner, and the very real ways we encounter Jesus.

Today’s encounter seems somewhat strange and mysterious to us as we read it. We begin the season of Lent with the story of Jesus in the wilderness, the place where the tempter meets him.

But maybe that is the first thing to pay attention to, the context of the encounter. And the context for this encounter begins with the timing. Satan’s encounter with Jesus in the wilderness comes directly following Jesus’ baptism at the Jordan, the moment that marks the beginning of Jesus’ formal ministry, his teaching and acts of healing and mercy, before he has called any disciples to come and follow him. The first act of Jesus’ ministry is for him to go into the wilderness, isolated and alone.

I often wonder if Jesus is an introvert? It seems like at some of the most important moments of his ministry, he sought and often found time to be alone, to be in prayer, to rest and prepare for what was to come. The wilderness was a place where one would go and there find their total reliance on God. And so Jesus goes to prepare, to rest, and to find his total reliance on God.

And it is in the wilderness that Satan encounter Jesus. We always remember the three trials that Satan sets before Jesus in the encounter. That of feeding himself, that of showing his divinity, and that of ruling the kingdoms of earth. But I wonder if truly the three trials were all really one temptation. The temptation of power.

The Tempter comes to Jesus in a time of personal hunger, and invites him to take on the power of selfishness. Feed yourself, he says. And I can’t help but think of the temptation of the crowd looking upon Jesus at the cross and saying, “If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” And when the Tempter invites Jesus to throw himself down so that he might prove his divinity, I can’t help but hear the high priest challenging Jesus to show his divinity, “I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.” And when the Tempter showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and offered him to rule it all, I can’t help but hear Pilate’s

question, "Are you the King of the Jews." Save yourself, show your divinity, where is your kingdom. The Tempter comes with the temptation of power.

And so we encounter Jesus in the wilderness as well. We encounter Jesus at our special dinner table. And we come with our own temptation. Maryetta Anschutz shares that temptation like this, "Our temptations come to us in moments when we look at others and feel insecure about not having enough. Temptation comes in judgements we make about strangers and friends who make choices we do not understand. Temptation rules us, making us able to look away from those in need and to live our lives unaffected by poverty, hunger, and disease. Temptation rages in moments when we allow our temper to define our lives or when addiction to wealth or influence, vanity or control - power define who we are. Temptation wins when we engage in the justification of little lies, small sins: a racist joke, a questionable business practice for the greater good, a criticism of a spouse or partner when he or she is not around. Temptation wins when we get so caught up in the trappings of life that we lose sight of life itself. These are the faceless moments of evil that, while mundane, lurk in the recesses of our lives and our souls."

We face Jesus in as ones who are both tempter and tempted, wanting to gain more power, wanting Jesus to use his power the way we want. And what does Jesus do? He resists, he resists and he turns the temptation on its head. Instead of making himself more powerful, he becomes a servant of others. Instead of proving his divinity, he invites others to judge for themselves. Instead of ruling in might, through force, through violence, Jesus' rules through love and forgiveness and mercy. And Jesus invites us to find, in our encounter, to find our own power turned upside down. Thanks be to God. Amen