

## **Saint Matthew's/San Mateo Episcopal Church**

**Lent 1, March 6, 2022**

### **READINGS:**

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

Romans 10:8b-13

Luke 4:1-13

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

No and No and No!

In our Gospel today, Jesus sweeps into the desert, filled with the Holy Spirit, and he stays there, Luke tells us, for forty days without eating anything! In these forty days of preparation and self-discovery, Jesus is inspired and sustained by the Holy Spirit as his life and mission as the Son of God becomes clear to him.

Forty-day fasts are pretty common in Scripture. Moses fasted after he received the law on Mount Sinai. He fasted again when he saw the people worshipping the golden calf. The prophet Elijah fled from Jezabel without taking any food with him. The people of the town of Ninevah fasted to show sorrow for their sins.

But Jesus is not alone in the desert silence. The devil is there too, hoping to use Jesus' strength, his God-like holiness, and the fame he will acquire to subject the world to evil. He tries everything he can think of to turn Jesus aside from God's purpose.

He tries something material first, since Jesus is very hungry. "No point in being empty. Just give a Godly command and this stone will turn into bread and get rid of that hunger." Jesus answers from Moses' second great speech to the Israelites, "One does not live by bread alone."

He tells the devil "NO."

The devil tries power next. "Join me, worship me. All the kingdoms of the world will be yours, as they are mine already." Jesus replies, again from the book of Deuteronomy, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."

He tells the devil "NO" again.

Even the devil can quote scripture.

So next, he uses part of our Psalm for today - the part about God commanding angels to guard his beloved one. "Just throw yourself off the pinnacle of the temple," he proposes. "God's angels will have no choice, they will have to come save you. Take advantage of who you are." A final time, Jesus answers from the same book of scripture. "You shall not tempt the Lord your God," he says.

He tells the devil "NO" a third time!

When tempted to do the wrong thing, Jesus stays true to himself- fully God and fully man.

And, Luke tells us, the devil leaves him until an "opportune time."

Welcome to the season of Lent!

John Chrysostom, first a hermit and later a priest and famous preacher, became patriarch of Constantinople in 397 A.D. He says this about the temptations of Christ:

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. What does 'then' mean? After the Spirit descended, after the voice from heaven said: 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.' The amazing thing is that scripture says it was the Holy Spirit who led him there!

All that Jesus did and suffered was for our instruction.

He consented to be led into the desert and to do battle with the devil so that when the baptized were assailed by greater temptations after baptism than before, they would not be troubled as though this were something unexpected, but would remain steadfast, bearing them all nobly.

You did not receive weapons so that you might sit at ease," says Chrysostom, "but so that you might fight!"

John Chrysostom says learn from Jesus. Stay true to the promises made at your Baptism.

When tempted to sin, say "No and No and No!"

Resisting sin, and turning from it back to God when we do, is not easy for us. It is a fight!

The Bible as a whole teaches us that the devil works in the world, attempting to turn our actions and our lives away from the purposes of God.

But when we are in the desert of temptation, we are not alone in that silence. Jesus, the Christ of God, has been there before!

He stands beside us!

Saint Paul reminds us in today's reading from his letter to the church in Rome that "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." As baptized disciples of Jesus, we confess with our lips that he is Lord of our lives. Because he stands with us, and has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit, we can learn from his example.

But how often do we remember that "the Word" who is near us, in our mouths, and in our hearts is Christ?

Always? Sometimes? Not often?

Perhaps this Lent, we might take some quiet time to look into ourselves, to see with new eyes the ways the Divine has worked within us - and then to express our joy at the transformation God has worked in us!

I would like to share a short story.

"A certain teacher, out of indigence, wore only a thin cotton cloth in the winter. A storm carried a bear down from the mountain by way of the river. Its head was hidden by the water.

The children, seeing its back, cried, "Teacher, look! A fur coat has fallen into the water, and you are cold. Go and fetch it!"

The teacher, in the extremity of need, leaped into the river to catch the fur coat. The bear quickly attacked him and caught him.

"Teacher!" the boys shouted, "Either grasp the coat or let it go and come out!"

"I am letting the fur coat go," shouted the teacher, "but the fur coat is not letting me go!"

Temptation has a way of getting hold of us in just such a grip!

Lent is a great opportunity for us!

It is a time for us to go, led by the Spirit, into the silence of the desert.

It is a time to proclaim with our lips and in our lives the Christ we follow.

It is a time to strengthen ourselves to resist temptation.

Looking for opportunities?

We will be giving our Lenten self-denial offering this year to Heifer International, to purchase farm animals for families in need of them. The greater our gifts, the more animals we will send, and the more families will raise the offspring of their gift animals to share with their neighbors. What a way to proclaim Christ's love to neighbors in need!

We will be sharing a Zoom Bible study based on the phrases of the Lord's Prayer with the family of Holy Spirit on Wednesday nights beginning March 16. "Teach us to pray," said the disciples to Jesus. What better way to strengthen our spiritual lives than to study the prayer he gave us in response together for six meetings?

May our worship, our giving, and our study this Lent strengthen us in the battle against sin. Like Jesus, when we meet temptations, in Lent and always, may we say No and No and No!

Amen.