

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, 02/22/2026.

### "A Way Through Temptation"

On this first Sunday in Lent, we deal with temptation... the temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and the temptation of Christ in the Wilderness by the devil.

We all face our own temptations. But our lessons illustrate the grace of God to stick with us through them and a way to battle our temptations.

I came across a story to get us thinking about temptation. A dog was given a fine meaty bone by a friendly neighbor. On his way home, with the bone firmly in his teeth, the dog had to cross a bridge over a narrow stream. When he reached the middle of the bridge, the dog paused to look into the water and saw a bigger dog with a bigger bone. It was actually his own reflection. Thinking that the other dog had a larger bone, he jumped in to take it by force. As he snapped at the bigger bone, the one in his teeth fell into the water and was lost.

In our first lesson today from Genesis 2 and 3, God set clear boundaries for the first humans in the Garden of Eden. "You may freely eat of every tree in the garden, including the tree of life; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat of it you shall die."

That's a lot of trees to choose from in the garden, isn't it? The Lord God gives a lot of freedom to the humans to choose what to eat, but God also said, do not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

At this point, in the relationship between God and humans, there is a relationship built on trust. God's love for the humans involves boundaries and trust. Like in a good marriage or healthy relationships, when there is trust, things go much better for you.

But as we know, sometimes we break that trust. And our decisions get us in trouble.

The serpent appears and tempts the humans... eve first. The serpent says to the woman, "You will surely not die". That is true, they will

not die a physical death right then and there. But death could mean a breakdown in relationship to God, each other, and the created order.

After giving into temptation, the woman took the fruit and ate. She then gave some to her husband and he ate. Notice, the man did not put up any resistance; he raised no questions, and he simply and silently took his turn eating. Then their eyes were opened and they noticed that they were naked. Before this they were unashamed of their bodies and being naked. The sin of disobeying God now led to shame. So, they covered themselves with fig leaves.

Then God comes to them in an anthropomorphic form, walking around the garden, and the man and woman hid from God. God asks, "Where are you?" "Did you eat from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" Then the sin of blame enters the world. The man said, the woman you made... she gave it to me. Then the woman turned around and blamed the serpent, "The serpent tricked me." It's like domino effect. One sin leads to another.

With our bad choices, there are often consequences. Sometimes you get away with things. But Here God doles out the consequences. The serpent is cursed, the woman will experience pain in childbearing, and the man's job of working the earth will become more difficult. With weeds and thorns, man will have to expend more energy to gain a living from the soil.

But if you keep reading, God did not abandon the humans after they sinned. Yes, God was disappointed that they did not obey. But God stuck with them. God even made clothing for them before sending them out of the Garden. To me this is a sign of God's grace and forgiveness.

We link this story to the doctrine of original sin. Sin for Lutherans is our inability to fear, love, and trust God above all things. We turn away from God and turn in on ourselves. We seek our own will first to gratify our desires.

But thanks be to God, as our Romans lesson says, for the free gift of grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, has abounded for the many. Even as sin entered the world through the first humans, we are now made

righteous, or put in a right relationship with God, through Jesus' work on the cross and in the resurrection.

To give us hope of overcoming our own temptations, Jesus battled the devil in the wilderness by knowing who he was, as God's beloved son, named and claimed in baptism, and by the power of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. Notice how the devil attacked Jesus when he was alone in the wilderness and hungry. The first temptation was bread. Jesus countered the devil with scripture. Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. The 2<sup>nd</sup> temptation, the devil tried to use scripture against Jesus by telling him to jump off the pinnacle of the temple where the angels would come and catch him. Psalm 90:11. Jesus again countered with scripture. Do not put the Lord your God to the test. Finally, the devil tempted Jesus with power over all nations. The wasn't even the devil's authority to grant. Jesus again countered with scripture. In the end, the devil is no match for Jesus' power. The devil will use lies and deceit to get people to succumb to temptation.

In our baptism, we are promised protection from death and the devil. By keeping God's word in our lives, we can battle the temptations we face. We will need other help too. In the end of this story, the angels came and waited on Jesus. Angels are God's messengers. Who are the angels that are waiting on you? Who is your community that is building you up and encouraging you? To me, this should be the church.

As we enter Lent, may we have the strength to battle our temptations and notice the community of angels around us cheering us on. Amen.