

February 26, 2023: First Sunday in Lent

Main Idea: God will keep showing up on our behalf, even (and especially) in our deepest doubts and our toughest trials.

As Lent begins, we find ourselves anticipating nagging doubts that eat away at some of the joy and certainty we felt through Christmas and Epiphany: Is Jesus really the Son of God, after all? Why do things have to happen this way to him? If Jesus is here to love and save the world, why doesn't his message seem to be catching on? All of these challenges and more feed into one, overarching question we can't avoid asking ourselves: If we know Jesus, then why are things still so hard? It's fair to say that Lent is almost a formalized test of our faith. Both our Hebrew Bible passage and our New Testament passage this morning meet us with empathy in that test—Adam and Eve are tested in the Garden of Eden and Jesus, himself, is tested in the wilderness.

In the back-and-forth between Eve and the serpent and Jesus and the devil, it seems that what is up for debate is God's power. However, what is *really* up for debate is God's intentions *for us* in relation to God's power. The doubt that creeps into our minds in both of these stories is the same: God must not care what happens to us as long as God remains all powerful, all mighty and all sovereign.

The serpent tries to convince Eve that God doesn't want her to be equal to God in knowledge and understanding. The devil tries to convince Jesus that God would have him starve; that God would have him fall to his death; that God is more distant than the devil (and less concerned with Jesus' well-being). In both cases—where Eve seems to cave to that notion and where Jesus does not—God shows up to remind his beloved that this couldn't be further from the truth. In the Garden of Eden, God comes walking to find Eve and Adam when they are driven into hiding by their shame. And in the wilderness, God sends angels to wait on Jesus when he has been exhausted and pushed to both his physical and his spiritual limits. Both times, God's purpose was to care for God's creation, to engage them, to remind them that a life with God is precisely that—a life with God—intended to be participatory and shared.

When we wrestle with the hardest questions we can wrestle with in a life of faith, we can be tempted to feel alone, forgotten, or to believe that God wants us to suffer as a reminder of who holds the cards and who doesn't. But we worship a God who will intervene in this kind of thinking every single time, showing up with us and for us all the way to the cross.

Scripture Summary

At the height of hunger and isolation, Jesus keenly feels the stab of temptation in the wilderness. Will he cave in to his primal needs and desires, or stay true to his identity and muster the strength to resist?



*Jesus was led
up by the Spirit
into the wilderness*

GOD'S WORD for Today

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First Reading: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

¹⁵The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶And the Lord God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”

3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” ²The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” ⁴But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; ⁵for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” ⁶So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Psalm: Psalm 32

Second Reading: Romans 5:12-19

¹²Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned— ¹³sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law.

¹⁴Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come. ¹⁵But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. ¹⁶And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. ¹⁷If, 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. ¹⁸Therefore 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. ¹⁹For 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.

Gospel: Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” ⁴But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” ⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying 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.’” ⁷Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” ¹¹Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.