

1 Lent, Luke 4:1-13  
Rev. Kimberly Glenn  
March 9, 2025

May the words of our lips and the meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

We are presented today with a topic that is familiar to all people everywhere. How many of us are not familiar with the lures of temptations. On this first Sunday of Lent, the season always opens with the story of Jesus' temptations in the wilderness. We are accustomed to thinking of temptations that we should avoid during Lent. That's why so many people who observe Lent choose to give up something that they have given in to the temptation to consume; something that they perceive they really shouldn't be consuming if they were following the rules of a healthy diet. They might give up chocolate or all sweets, heaven forbid, or caffeine or alcohol.

But the word that our Bible translates as temptation is more properly translated as test. I don't know about you, but it doesn't require a whole lot of inner strength for me to forgo a brownie or a cup of coffee. It takes willpower for sure, and determination. But it doesn't test my ability to trust others. And it doesn't strengthen my faith or trust in God. Giving up bad habits strengthens my faith in myself. That is a good thing. But it is not what the test in the wilderness for Jesus is all about. Jesus is not in the wilderness to shore up his own ego, but the Holy Spirit drove Jesus to that desolate place to allow Satan to test the strength of Jesus' relationship with God. The Spirit drove Jesus there but he did not resist. With a sense of obedience to God and confidence that He had been chosen for this test, he stayed there for forty days with no food to hold his body and soul together.

1 Lent, Luke 4:1-13  
Rev. Kimberly Glenn  
March 9, 2025

You might recall from the Old Testament, that when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, they wandered in the wilderness and were tested by God for forty years. They ran out of food, they ran out of water and they ran out of patience. While Moses went up on the mountain for forty days and forty nights to meet God, the whole group of them presumed he had died. They decided right then to make their own god to protect them. They melted their jewelry and made a golden calf. Now there's something we can all put our faith and trust in, right? The point is they had not established faith in God and they had not nurtured trust in each other to sustain a life together. Turns out they had a long way to go to become the people God was calling them to be.

All of us face our own wilderness experiences whether we see them as that or not. And we all are prone to distractions that can lead us away from the one who is calling us to join Him on the way. Whether or not we believe Satan is involved in those distractions, they are there. One of the best examples in modern literature of the devil attempting to steer people away from God is the novel by C.S. Lewis called *The Screwtape Letters*. As an aside here, I was once doing an internship at a tiny church in Richmond, St. Bartholomew's, and was looking at the books in their library one day. I saw "The Screwtape Letters" filed under the category of Marriage. It's not about marriage. It's about the forces of evil getting worming into our hearts and minds telling us we cannot trust what we cannot see. Faith is something we do not have to see to know that it is there, like happiness or love or sadness or the pain of regret.

In *The Screwtape Letters*, the devil named Screwtape sends letters containing diabolical advice to his nephew Wormwood who has been tasked with turning the heart

1 Lent, Luke 4:1-13  
Rev. Kimberly Glenn  
March 9, 2025

of his victim, named The Patient, away from God and toward the devil. When Wormwood discovers that The Patient has been reading and is developing thoughts about faith and truth, he panics and sends an urgent message to his Uncle Screwtape. Screwtape advises him to remind The Patient how hungry he is, that it would be better to put those books and thoughts away and go get lunch. Wormwood convinces The Patient that he can come back to those thoughts at a more convenient time. Then The Patient begins to develop a genuine sense of humility, seeing himself honestly and not as the center of the universe. When told of this, Uncle Screwtape warns that true humility is dangerous to his and Wormwood's cause because humility allows The Patient to focus on God and others instead of himself. To stop this from happening, Wormwood tries to make The Patient self-aware of his humility. When he starts thinking, *"Wow, I'm really humble now,"* then pride can sneak in through the back door and lead The Patient to just where Uncle Screwtape wants him to be, safely away from any thoughts of God.

Uncle Screwtape is a mild mannered version of the way the gospels characterize the devil. When the devil tempts Jesus the tests are supernatural tests because the devil knows, more than anyone else, that Jesus possesses the power of God. The tests are meant to tempt Jesus to misuse the power that he has been given. When the devil tempts him to satisfy his hunger, he presents Jesus with a stone and tells him to turn it into bread. Jesus calls on his deep and abiding love for God and resists. Jesus resists all of the devil's temptations to follow a more convenient path, an easier path, one that would bring him the best of what most of humanity thinks they need - power, control and

1 Lent, Luke 4:1-13  
Rev. Kimberly Glenn  
March 9, 2025

security. Jesus knows that those things belong to God. They are given to humanity by God's grace through relationship with Him through Christ.

None of us are likely to encounter the devil for forty days in the wilderness the way that Jesus did. We won't encounter evil in the way the Israelites did in the wilderness with Moses. But we do and will encounter the devil in the more subtle ways of Wormwood and Screwtape. I found these words in an essay by an Episcopal priest friend of mine named Glenn Busch. He said, "The work of hell is accomplished in the little things, in the mundane day today small decisions that change minds and attitudes and points of view and afflict the human heart. The real work of the devil is accomplished in the small resentment we hang onto, in that little grudge we just don't want to give up. It is accomplished in the raised eyebrow, in the snort of contempt. It is in the neighbor we refuse to forgive, in the self-righteous tone that we inflict on those who differ from us. It is in our refusal to get over hurt feelings, in the small uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors and our colleagues. It is in the hatred that we think we disguise behind a well mannered look, and it is present in our most imperceptible acts of hypocrisy. It is in our blindness to human need and suffering that is where the real devil's work is done, and the common activities of our daily lives each unsuspecting day, one day at a time."

Those attitudes are ones the devil delights in. In contrast, we know Jesus who was one with God, believed that we should love our neighbors, all people, as ourselves. In order to prepare ourselves for that we have this time before us. These forty days of Lent are set aside to anchor ourselves more deeply in the Holy Spirit; to come to

1 Lent, Luke 4:1-13  
Rev. Kimberly Glenn  
March 9, 2025

recognize God in our midst, to see God in ourselves more clearly. It doesn't matter whether you choose to give up some habit that takes time away from knowing God more intimately or whether you add a discipline to your life that nourishes your own divine spirit within you. But it does matter that you take this time seriously. Because like the devil told Jesus, he will be back at a more convenient time. Be prepared! Amen.