

March 1, 2020 • First Sunday in Lent • Holy Communion

“Be the Bridge”

Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris



Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for 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 splendour; 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.

Since sometime in the 2nd or 3rd centuries, the church has set apart this season we call "Lent" as a time of forty days to intentionally reflect on our lives and on our faith.

For generations and generations, Christians have acknowledged that the only way to really be able to take in the meaning and power of the Easter Resurrection is to prepare ourselves, to create space within our daily lives for the Holy Spirit to enter and teach us and guide us. To make space in our hearts and minds for God to work miracles in and through us.

Lent is still a time of spiritual preparation acknowledging the need we all have to renew our faith. In Lent, the church urges us to pray, to fast and to give away, to give generously and prodigally as does God. To give our time, our talents, our money, our love. To give because others are in need. And to give because we need to be less comfortable, less prideful, less self-reliant, less defended by our stuff, our ego, our accomplishments.

Lent is to be a season of centering, of refocusing, of realigning our lives and our priorities to help us be more of a disciple of Jesus Christ. In this 40-day season set aside for us to renew our faith, we pray and meditate on the cross, the symbol of the reconciliation of heaven and earth, the ultimate bridge, restoring us into full relationship with God, with one another, and with the church.

And while, for each of us, this is a solitary journey, an individual endeavor, we are not alone in it. Jesus created the church because he knew how very much we need one another to have faith. Together we continue to grow and learn, to pray and worship. Together we weep when another weeps and we rejoice when another rejoices. Together we serve and together we witness to what is real and true and powerful for us. And together now we enter this season of spiritual work, this season of Lent, because we know and we acknowledge the need we all have to grow in faith.

This is a community in which we pursue the big questions together:

Who am I? Why am I on this earth? What does it mean to follow Christ in this day and age? How will I find strength for the challenges of life? How do I live responsibly and with integrity? What does it mean to serve God's people? How do I embrace God's love for me?

The season of Lent begins, as it does every year, with Ash Wednesday and with the story of Jesus' Temptation.

Jesus, who has been baptized by John. Jesus, who has heard the voice of God at his baptism and again at his Transfiguration saying: "This is my Son, my beloved, my Chosen One." This is now the moment, out there in the wilderness alone, when even Jesus takes time out for forty days and forty nights to ask: where am I going? What are my priorities? To what do I give my allegiance? So he goes out to pray. To watch and wait. And there, in his wilderness time, he is tempted to turn away from God.

Three times the devil tempts Jesus; three times Jesus asserts his allegiance to God. And at the end of his forty days and forty nights, Jesus affirms: we live by the Word of God, not by bread alone. We worship God who gives power over the evil forces of this world. We will not be so arrogant as to put God to the test. Jesus turns to God, and in this turning is the model for our Lenten journey.

Lent in the Year of our Lord 2020 finds us, as we have noted many times, living in a time of extreme polarization—in national and international politics, in public debate about almost everything, and even in the church itself. We've let ourselves fall deeper and deeper into what columnist David Brooks calls the Golden Age of 'Theyism.'

This deeply troubles many of us and we wonder about not only where all this may lead but also what in the world we can do about it. For this reason, and to tune our Lenten spiritual work to the work of reconciliation and the building up of the whole, we have chosen as our Lenten theme: Be the Bridge. It opens our minds and hearts to consider how, in our own thoughts, interactions, conversations and practices we might be the bridge that crosses divides and turns suspicion and hatred into conversation, humility, empathy and courage.

Our model is Jesus himself, for, in the story of his Temptation, Jesus himself becomes a bridge of many kinds. For our sake, he becomes a bridge between himself and the Devil, the one who continues to tempt us to turn away from our true calling. For our sake, he becomes the bridge to all that God is asking of him, entering into his vocation that will bring life to us and to the world. For our sake, Jesus becomes God's bridge to us, that we might have life and have it abundantly.

The self-examination and fasting asked of us in Lent is not to be inward-turning or self-serving. Like Jesus the Bridge, we are freed to turn outward, towards God and towards one another, bridging any broken relationships in personal and social relationships. My prayer is that this Lent 2020 can become a time for us to ponder these things, individually and together. In prayer and worship. In study and service. In quiet, and in engagement with the world around us.

So as I close this morning, and as we prepare our hearts to receive this sacrament of reconciliation and hope, let me re-frame Lenten fasting in a prayer that some of you know. This Lent, as we seek new ways to "be the bridge", may we

Fast from judging others; and feast on the Christ dwelling in them.
Fast from emphasis on differences; and feast on the unity of all life.
Fast from apparent darkness; and feast on the reality of light.
Fast from discontent; and feast on gratitude.
Fast from anger; and feast on patience.
Fast from worry; and feast on trust.
Fast from complaining; and feast on appreciation.
Fast from unrelenting pressures; and feast on unceasing prayer.
Fast from hostility; and feast on nonviolence.
Fast from bitterness; and feast on forgiveness.
Fast from self-concern; and feast on compassion for others.
Fast from personal anxiety; and feast on eternal truth.
Fast from discouragement; and feast on hope.
Fast from suspicion; and feast on truth.
Fast from thoughts that weaken; and feast on promises that inspire.

May the promises of Christ the Bridge lead us to the feast of life.

Thanks be to God,

AMEN