

(W)holiness: Resisting Temptation
First in a Lenten Series on My Body: God's Temple

The First Sunday of Lent ~ February 21, 2010

Luke 4:1-13 (The Message)

¹⁻²Now Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wild. For forty wilderness days and nights he was tested by the Devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when the time was up he was hungry.

³The Devil, playing on his hunger, gave the first test: "Since you're God's Son, command this stone to turn into a loaf of bread."

⁴Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy: "It takes more than bread to really live."

⁵⁻⁷For the second test he led him up and spread out all the kingdoms of the earth on display at once. Then the Devil said, "They're yours in all their splendor to serve your pleasure. I'm in charge of them all and can turn them over to whomever I wish. Worship me and they're yours, the whole works."

⁸Jesus refused, again backing his refusal with Deuteronomy: "Worship the Lord your God and only the Lord your God. Serve him with absolute single-heartedness."

⁹⁻¹¹For the third test the Devil took him to Jerusalem and put him on top of the Temple. He said, "If you are God's Son, jump. It's written, isn't it, that 'he has placed you in the care of angels to protect you; they will catch you; you won't so much as stub your toe on a stone'?"

¹²"Yes," said Jesus, "and it's also written, 'Don't you dare tempt the Lord your God.'"

¹³That completed the testing. The Devil retreated temporarily, lying in wait for another opportunity.

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It is the season of Lent. I look forward to this liturgical season in the rhythm of the church year. It is a holy time. Unlike Advent, there is little commercialism, no flurry and frenzy of holiday parties and high expectations. It is a quiet, reflective, meditative season, one that invites us to deepen our relationship with God.

This year, the Worship and Music Committee and I have been working on the theme *My Body: God's Temple*. The intention of this theme is for us to use this 40 day Lenten period to better care for our bodies which in turn house our minds and our spirits. Here's the premise: if we do not care for our bodies, we cannot be the best that God intends us to be.

Via the internet this past week, I invited you to begin to assess how you want to make your body more (w)holy this Lent. To be holy is to be whole. When our lives are set apart for God, when they are devoted to God's excellent purposes, then we are both whole and holy.

Probably that's why the notion of "fasting" is associated with Lent. If we choose to empty ourselves of something – be it food or a bad habit or a negative attitude or violent language or self-centeredness oryou fill in the blank....then there is space and room within us to be filled by God's love and will and intentions.

"Fasting," writes James Earl Massey "is not a renunciation of life. It is not only an act of abstinence. It is an affirmative act. It is a way of acknowledging that "one does not live by bread alone." It is a way of acknowledging our need for spiritual food, for spiritual disciplines. It is a means by which new life is released within us."

"Fasting" writes Marjorie Thompson "is a form of interior spring house cleaning. Oh! how satisfying and freeing it is to get rid of all that unnecessary stuff."

Or in the words of Clarence Jordan in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, "Lenten fasting provides us a way of "moving fast forward to God."

All of these ideas suggest the reason that Jesus' fasted in the wilderness. Knowing he was about to be tempted, he chose to empty himself so that there would be space and room to be filled by God's love and will and intentions. And indeed, he was able to say "No" to the Devil's temptations of satisfying his physical hunger, claiming personal power and worshipping the idols of this world.

This morning, I invite you to consider from what you need to "fast" this Lent in order to make your body, your self, "God's temple." On the insert in your bulletin, consider taking a brief inventory.

First of all, think about your current devotional life - the intentional time that you spend each day with God. How would you characterize your daily devotional life?

Then consider how well you are caring for your body through diet and exercise. How would you characterize your current eating and exercise habits?

A third area of concern is your interpersonal relationships. Do you have friends/confidants outside of your immediate family? Are there relationships that need to be repaired? Consider the emotional drain on your body when relationships are not in order.

So now reflect and pray about your Lenten fast. Is there something that you want to eliminate so that there is room to replace it with healthy intentions for the well being of your body?

Michael Slaughter in his book *Momentum for Life* suggests that we all need momentum in order to achieve a full and holy life. We need to set goals for ourselves and we need to hold ourselves accountable to God for these goals. He uses the 2004 World Series as an example of momentum. Most likely, you remember that World Series well! The curse of the Bambino seemed to strike again as our hometown Red Sox fell to the mighty Yankees in the first 3 games of the American League playoffs. Sportscasters reminded us that no team had ever come back

after being down 4 games to none. Boston would need to win four games straight, the last 2 of them in Yankee Stadium.

The Red Sox won games 4 and 5. There was a growing confidence in the eyes of the players as they traveled to New York. It appeared that momentum had begun to turn in our direction and a team that has momentum is on the move and hard to stop. The Sox went on to accomplish what no other team in the history of baseball ever has. They won the American League championship series against the Yankees and then they swept the St. Louis Cardinals in 4 straight games to win the World Series. Momentum!

It is this kind of momentum that we witness day after day as we watch the Winter Olympics. Those Olympic athletes take their goals seriously and they have a commitment to the best that they can be. They build momentum. Last Wednesday was an amazing day of momentum for American athletes. Lindsey Vonn overcame injury with momentum as she skied to a downhill gold medal title. Speed skater Shani Davis would not have won the gold by 18 one hundredths of a second if he had not had momentum. Shaun White demonstrated momentum as he soared to glory in his double McTwist halfpipe. Momentum.

We all need momentum if we are to get where we want to be in our faith, in our physical health, and in our relationship with God and with others. Remember, our bodies ARE God's temples. We need to care for them and strive daily for wholeness and holiness.

There is a biblical analogy that teaches us about momentum. Remember, the city of Jerusalem is built on a hill at an elevation of some 2500 feet. In ancient times, every faithful Jew was expected to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem at least once a year to make an honorable, excellent offering to the Temple. No matter where you came from, you faced quite a climb to reach the Temple in Jerusalem. The journey involved the pilgrim's full commitment of body, mind and spirit. Worshipers, while making the ascent to the holy city, sang what are called Psalms of Ascent. In the book of Psalms this includes Psalm 120 through Psalm 134. Each Sunday during Lent we will read one of these Psalms. Each of them are songs that reinforce character, faith and persistence in the face of resistance. They are songs that will inspire us as we strive to find momentum in bettering our bodies for our work as Christ's disciples.

But we know that we are only human. We know how easy it is to lose our momentum. Mike Slaughter claims that rationalizing, procrastination and poor visualization often interfere with our momentum and good intentions. You'll find these listed on the back of your Inventory handout.*

The first obstacle is rationalizing, telling ourselves that we can live at the top without the effort of the climb. "I am the exception," we misguidedly tell ourselves. Because we live in a culture that has a passion for the immediate, we want "easy" and "now" and we try to make God work that way too. Avoiding perspiration at all costs, we lower the bar. We change God's standard of measure. We sell out by working for money rather than meaning. We turn to sex for sex's sake. We shop til we drop and end up with more credit debt and less to share with those who have little. We downplay Jesus' warning that "the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it." (Matthew 7:13).

*I am indebted to Mike Slaughter's book *Momentum for Life* and his ideas and examples that I have used in this sermon.

Like our ancestors, we, too need to offer prayers of repentance and get ourselves right with God. The opening words of the very first Psalm of Ascent, Psalm 120, sung at the beginning of the pilgrimage, are prayers of repentance. As they began their journey, worshipers sang, "I cry to God, deliver me from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue." (Psalm 120: 1 – 2). So, too, as we begin our Lenten journey, let us offer our prayer of repentance to God and name those rationalized, sweat-avoiding habits that we need to deal with. You'll notice on your Inventory/Intentions worksheet, there is a place for you to respond to this obstacle of rationalizing.

Then there is Procrastination which is another huge momentum buster! Whenever we go into a test or a presentation or meeting or any event for which we have responsibility unprepared, we know the feelings of inadequacy and self doubt that procrastination, or the failure to take adequate measures of preparation, feeds. Procrastination has a way of attaching itself to our psyche and it continues to feed on our anxiety and even dreams, marked by panic, failure and defeat. So it becomes destructive to our emotional and even physical health.

Many ancient worshipers never made the pilgrimage to the temple because they felt overwhelmed by the preparations and the hassles. In the winter it snows in Jerusalem and in the summer it's very hot. "It's not such a good day to go up to the house of the Lord," people would say as they procrastinated. They might cite problems with the traffic, or the crowds or not having the right clothes to wear or not knowing what to do with the children. "It's easier to stay home," many people concluded. But nothing worthwhile is ever easy and the road to the house of God has always been steep and narrow.

The instructor in Proverbs asks "How long will you lie there, O lazybones? When will you rise from your sleep?soon poverty will come upon you like a robber." (Proverbs 6: 9 – 11) The writer of Proverbs warns us that procrastination will make you poor – not only in your wallet but in your spirit as well.

In what areas of your life do you tend to procrastinate? How are you experiencing "poverty" in those areas?

The third obstacle is what I call "poor visualization" or "I don't have a picture of where I am going." The Psalms of Ascent are a constant reminder how important it is to have a picture in mind of where we are going and what our goal is because as the climb gets harder and the ascent becomes steeper, we need a clear reminder of why we started the climb in the first place. As dangers and temptations lurk around the perilous trail, we need to hang on to the vivid picture of our destination.

Do you remember a few years ago when we, as a congregation, worked on a Vision for Holy Trinity? The book of Proverbs reminded us that "Where there is no vision, the people perish." (Proverbs 29:18) The vision, "Everyone in ministry ~ United in God's love" and the 6 goals that we set have been our blueprint for ministry. With ongoing momentum, we have accomplished many of the goals that we set for ourselves as a church.

The same is true for our personal faith journey. We all need to have a picture of where we are going this Lent, how God wants us to care for our bodies, for they are God's temples. On your Inventory and Intentions worksheet there is a place for you to claim your own blueprint for Lent.

I hope that you will take your worksheet home and spend some time talking with God about your intentions for Lent. Sometimes it's helpful to take the journey of ascent with others. That's why we're providing a study hour after worship on Sundays from 11 – 12 noon and a half hour study on Wednesday nights from 6:30 – 7:00 throughout Lent. It is by sharing our intentions with another and holding one another up in prayer that we can keep up our spiritual momentum. "Take time to be holy" the hymn reminds us, "the world rushes on; spend much time in secret with Jesus alone. By looking to Jesus, like him thou shalt be; thy friends in thy conduct his likeness shall see."

May you have a blessed Lent and may your intentions and efforts help to transform your body into God's temple. Amen and Amen.

Let us pray: Guide each of us in this Lenten season to find ways to renew our relationship with you, O God. Save us from rationalization, procrastination and a lack of visualizing your bigger purpose for our lives. Help us to fast from those things that keep us from spending time with you. Abide with us, challenging and inspiring us to be fit in body, mind and spirit so that we might be whole and holy for you. Amen.

My Lenten Inventory and Intentions

1. Put a checkmark beside the words that describe your current devotional life:
 Nonexistent
 Sporadic
 Regular
 Dry/Boring
 Invigorating/Growing
 Meaningful
 Exciting
 Stagnant
 Superficial

2. How would you characterize your current eating exercise habits?
 Poor Fair Good Excellent

3. How would you characterize your interpersonal relationships?
With family members? _____
With friends? _____
With colleagues or others with whom you interact on a daily basis? _____
4. From what will you fast this Lent so that there is room and space for healthy intentions to make yourself more (w)holy? What is your Lenten plan that will make you healthier and more “(w)holy” by the end of Lent?

Obstacles that interfere with my momentum...

Rationalization

What rationalized, sweat-avoiding habits can you name that you need to deal with?

Procrastination

In what areas of your life do you tend to procrastinate?

Poor Visualization

What is your blueprint? your plan for this Lent that will bring you into a closer relationship with God and make you more (w)holy?
