



Broad Street Presbyterian Church

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“The Rest of Your Life”

Luke 4:1-13

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The season of Lent is late this year. About as late as it ever gets. I don't like waiting this long for Lent. Ministers like Lent. It's just one of those things. Children love Christmas. Missionaries love Epiphany. Charismatics prefer Pentecost. But for preachers, nothing beats Lent. It's a time to focus on things we ministers just can't get enough of – things like sin, mortality, repentance and remorse. Someone once sent me some substitute song lyrics that gently poke fun at our affection for Lent. (Sung to the tune of “My Favorite Things”)

Sackcloth and ashes, and days without eating;
Mortification and wailing and weeping;
A hair shirt that scratches, a nettle that stings;
These are a few of my favorite things

When it's Christmas,
When the tree's lit,
When the cards are sent;
I simply remember my favorite things,
And then I can't wa-a-a-it till Lent!

The waiting is over. It's Lent. Thanks be to God, it's Lent. Lent is a time of intentional introspection and self-examination, a time to take a look at the lives we are living and take stock. It's a time that looks forward to the Sunday morning forty days from now when we will crowd into our pews to affirm our trust in the boldest notion in the history of the world: that Jesus of Nazareth was God's beloved and that he lived and died for us and that God raised him from the dead, and, therefore, death no longer has any power over us.¹

That's not an affirmation one can make casually. Easter requires some preparation. That's what Lent is, and Lent begins every year with the same story of Jesus and the forty days in the wilderness and the appearance of Satan and his temptations.

What happened out there? What took place between Jesus and Satan?

In my experience, there are two ways to go with the story of the temptation. One is keep things lighthearted and somewhat superficial. Focus on the small temptations of daily life. Tell stories about folks who are tempted to cheat on their diet or cut corners in filling out their tax returns.

Or we can deal with the real, deep, life-changing temptations that occasionally come our way. I could get things started by telling you about the time that I Except I really don't want to tell you about that time. Or I could tell you about the time that Ann.... Or the time that Bill... Except that neither of them has shared with me those stories. You have to know and trust people really, really well before they tell you their struggles with

¹ <http://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2002/021702.html>

temptation. What's the worst thing that you were ever tempted to do? Before anyone actually says anything, let me make this perfectly clear. This was a rhetorical question. I'm not sure we're ready to hear our answers to that question. I'm not sure we're ready to have an honest conversation about the real temptations that we face as human beings.

The Bible is clear about this. Jesus faces real temptation. Hebrews 4:15 says, "We have one who in every respect has been tested as we are." It makes sense that because Jesus is so strong and so faithful that his temptations would be formidable ones. As renowned preacher George Buttrick once said in a sermon, "You do not have a sea storm in a roadside puddle."²

We will never know exactly what happens out there in the wilderness but we do know one thing: Jesus emerges on the other side ready to take on his role as savior of the world. He emerges knowing who he is and what he needs to do.

That got me thinking. I was taught to see the temptations as being about choosing between right and wrong but maybe that's not what they are about at all. Think about it. Satan doesn't go up to Jesus and say, "Psst. Jesus. Hey, man, let's steal a car, drink a fifth of gin and go to a strip club. What do you think?" Instead, Satan asks Jesus, "Who do you want to be? What do you want to do with your life? Let me make a few suggestions...."

Think of Satan as more of a career counselor than a bad influence, more life coach than hardened criminal.

The question posed to Jesus during those forty days is:

So, what are you going to do with the rest of your life?

That's a good question for Jesus. And that's a good question for us. So, what are you going to do with the rest of your life? How about if we spend the next forty days answering that question? That sounds more interesting than giving up chocolate.

What are you going to do with the rest of your life?

If you were here earlier this week for the Ash Wednesday service, you may already be doing this work. There's something about those ashes that inspires big picture thinking. "You are dust. And to dust you shall return." That pesky reminder of our mortality. We don't have all the time in the world. Some day we are going to die. So, what are we going to do with this one life we have been given?

Writer Anne Lamott told a bunch of graduating seniors, "Your problem is how you are going to spend this one odd and precious life you have been issued. Whether you're going to spend it trying to look good and creating the illusion that you have power over people and circumstances, or whether you are going to taste it, enjoy it and find out the truth about who you are."³

So, what are you going to do with the rest of your life?

That's a great question if you are just starting out in life or you are right in the middle of it or if all you have left is the dying. I've seen folks make some amazing choices about the rest of their life when they had very little life left in them.

² Quoted by Fred Craddock, *Cherry Log Sermons*, p. 16.

³ Anne Lamott, Salon.com, June 6, 2003. She gave the undergraduate and interdisciplinary studies commencement address at the University of California at Berkeley in May 2003.

Keep in mind that when Jesus is faced with this question, he is no child, no young adult. He is 30 years old, middle aged given the life span of folks in those days. Evidently, the Spirit thinks it's time Jesus figures out who he is and where he is heading.

At the end of those forty days, Jesus has an answer to that question. His answer:

I am going to spend the rest of my life proclaiming the good news of God.

That's a good answer. I don't know what your answer will be, but I do have a few guesses at what I might come up with at the end of these forty days.

I'm going to spend the rest of my life trying to let go of everything that separates me from God.

I'm going to spend the rest of my time on earth trying to love the people in my life as deeply as I can.

I'm going to spend the rest of my life sharing my resources with a world in great need.

I know. All of my potential answers are idealistic and impossible to achieve and grand and glorious and big but, what the heck, this is my one life – my only shot – why not aim high?

So, what are **you** going to do with the rest of your life?

Answering that question may involve sackcloth and ashes, hours on bended knees, but it might just as easily involve more time spent with people you love, more time doing work that feeds your soul, more time serving God's people, more time claiming your own health and well-being, more time repairing and mending the world God loves.

I suggest we start small and tangible. Locate the piece of paper included in your bulletin this morning. Identify one thing that you want to take on in the next forty, one area of your life in which you would like growth to occur. Write it down on the piece of paper. Following the sermon, there will be a few minutes of silence to give you time to think and write. And then, during the hymn, you are invited to bring your paper forward and place it in the big basket.

As you decide what to write down, start small and specific, but aim high. After all, this is your one precious life. Amen.