

The Rev. Dr. Sandi Kerner

Well, I have to confess, Charlie tempted me to come out here and do this in the front. So. Or maybe he tested me. I'm not sure which, but anyway, here I am. We'll see how it goes. When I begin talking about a man who's quite the hero apparently around here, I didn't know George Whitfield from the 1700s.

George was a was a preacher, was an Anglican priest, traveled the roads over there, and the highways and byways in the British Isles and Ireland came over here many times. In fact, they say he came over 13 times across the ocean in the 1700s. Think about that. And they say also that he logged something like 18,000 sermons under his belt, preaching day and night, just about to accomplish that in his lifetime.

He was not going to miss an opportunity to preach God's Word and he said this toward the end of his life. I would rather wear out than rust out. And he certainly lived by that. He was also associated with what he called the sleeping church. He often talked about the church being like a sleeping giant, someone who was asleep and missing the good news of Jesus Christ people in his day.

I don't know if it's true. In our day, it could be where people were just a little complacent. They came to church, they did their thing. They listened to the preacher, whoever it was, they prayed and they went home. But they came in and they were the same way almost when they went out. And George didn't like that.

And George was driven by a passion to wake up the sleeping giant, to wake up the church. And he did that by giving witness to, to really our own frailty, to our vulnerability, to our inability to keep the law and our inability to follow Jesus fully, our sinfulness, our brokenness, the things that we just we can't do on our own.

We're powerless. And as our brothers and sisters and 12 step movements talk about that, we are powerless. First step to make that change in our lives, we need to turn our lives over to a power greater than us. And George's focus was to look at the sins in our lives, to look at the

places where we're missing the mark, and to come under the cross of Jesus Christ, the perfect one, the sinless one who took on our sin, as Charlie talked about last week to be sin for us and to give us his righteousness.

And so George pointed to that and said, this is what's going to wake up the church when we when we turn again and we turn again, and we turn again to the Lord, and we keep repenting and we keep turning because that's what we're called to do as Christians, he said. That will wake up the sleeping giant and the Holy Spirit will come down and fill.

And it's true of every renewal movement, every revival movement you've ever seen. It doesn't begin with theatrics. It begins with people turning their hearts again to God and repenting and crying out for God's mercy. And here we are in the season of lent. It's a perfect time for our awakening. So one time George Whitfield was preaching in an American church.

It was rainy, kind of like it was early this morning. Quiet morning. The congregation was just sort of there, barely there from what his description is. And there was a man. I'm so glad nobody's in the front pew right here. But there was a man sitting in the front pew who began to go to sleep, and he started snoring, and they could all hear him.

And he. George got really angry and really fired up at the same time. And so he pounded. Sorry, pounded the pulpit, stomped on the floor, and the whole church shook. And the guy just about came out of his seat, woke up. But George did that. He wanted the church to wake up. His theatrics got him actually expelled from most pulpits.

He ended up preaching out, preaching in the air, preaching all over the place, in marketplaces and squares, fields, wherever he could go. And thousands of people came to hear him and his movement. The movement that he was so much a part of, is where the Wesley's Charles and John Wesley was called the Great Awakening, literally awakening the church to the great gift of God in Jesus Christ, his forgiveness of sins, and the greatest invitation to turn and to know again the voice of our beloved, our beloved father who loves us so much.

So lent gives us the opportunity for a great awakening, and we certainly experience that on Ash Wednesday, as we came forward to receive those ashes on our heads, many of us were here a reminder of our mortality that we don't have an unlimited amount of time to turn again to God. There's a sense of urgency about it. So come and receive those ashes on your head, not as a sign to the world, but as a sign to yourself and receive them right in that same place where you received the chrism, the oil that was put on your head at baptism when you were sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ's own

forever. Come forward and receive that. So we began our Lenten observance with that day. Today we begin with the Great Litany, and I know it's great. It's long, but it's also a wonderful opportunity to turn again to God. The first ten petitions or so are all about praying. Good Lord, deliver us from these things that we cannot deliver ourselves from where we are powerless.

To do this, God, we need your help. We stand in need. And Jesus said in Luke's gospel, blessed are the poor in spirit, the ones who know their need for theirs is the kingdom of God. Are you in need today of turning again to God? It's a great opportunity right here. It's interesting, too, that the second part of that litany, all 20 petitions, are asking God that we could join him in His rule and his reign on this earth by doing the things that are mentioned in those.

Go back and read the whole great litany, I dare you. I double dog dare you. I triple dog dare you to go back and read the Great Litany as part of your prayer to again turn your heart to the Lord and let the Lord speak to you about those spaces and places where you're missing the mark.

And all you need to do is come and stand under the cross and receive his great mercy for you. Also on the first Sunday of Lent, we know what's coming. Every year. There's always the gospel that's read of Jesus in the wilderness, being tempted by the devil. And throughout the this wilderness season of lent, whether it's these 40 days or whether you're in a wilderness season yourself in your life, it's an opportunity again to turn to the Lord and be strengthened.

Because we know that Jesus fought the enemy by turning again to God, and by quoting Scripture and by living under God's rule and reign. And so it's again, it's another opportunity to turn to the Lord together.

The enemy of our souls has been at work. The ancient serpent.

In our slumber has been ancient to think about it. The first reading we heard today, Adam and Eve in the garden. What does the devil say to tempt them? Well, God has given them this whole beautiful garden with all kinds of food and fruit and gorgeous beauty. And this the sense, Genesis says, of walking with God in the cool of the evening, this lovely sense of intimacy with God.

And they were naked and they were not ashamed. They were vulnerable before God. Everything. They had stood out to him and they had no shame. And as they walked in the garden, they their eyes were drawn to this one tree that God said of that tree in the middle of the garden, you shall not eat. And along comes the serpent, the snake, Satan, the deceiver, who pulls them aside and says, look, really?

Did God really say you could eat from that tree? Oh, come on, come on. He knows that your eyes will be opened and then you'll be like God. Oh, so then Eve and then gave it to Adam. Adam eight and then they both their eyes were opened indeed. And they realized that they were naked and so they hid themselves.

They hid away from God. And when God came looking for them in the cool of the evening, they were hiding in the bushes. It's typical, isn't it? The serpent likes to deceive, likes to question. God likes to say no. God doesn't mean that for you. Surely God wants you to be like him. Actually, they already were. That's the lie.

God created them in his image, male and female. He already created them. They didn't have to prove anything. And here they are falling for that story this time. Story. We fall for all the time at least. I don't know about you, but I do. And so here is this temptation now of Jesus. Jesus is out in the desert, and he's come out there into the desert in Matthew chapter four.

It's right after literally right after he's dripping wet in the Jordan River. After John's baptism. And you remember what happened a few weeks ago as we began epiphany, he descended into the

water. And when Jesus came out of the water, the Holy Spirit came upon him and rested upon him. And the words of the father, this is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased.

Those words, I imagine, are still resonating in Jesus heart and mind. He's still dripping wet from the Jordan River. He goes out. It says in Mark's gospel, he's driven out into the desert to be tempted by Satan. And yes, he's fasting for 40 days and 40 long nights in the desert. The desert is not. Don't think of sand.

Think of rocks and rocks and rocks as far as the eye can see stones, millions of stones everywhere. Jesus is hungry. He's tired. He's famished. He's exhausted. He's been praying for 40 days and 40 nights. And who shows up at the opportune time? The serpent, the ancient foe, comes and says to him, if you are the Son of God, what do you mean?

If you are? We should go back to that passage in Matthew three, where the father said, this is my beloved son. Jesus knew he was God's beloved son. And here's the devil already suggesting, if you are the Son of God, prove it. Just go ahead and turn these stones into bread. You're hungry anyway, right? So just eat. You can do that.

Jesus. But Jesus had set aside that divine prerogative. Yes. He's human. Yes, he's fully divine, uniquely the Son of God. And yet he's set that aside. So would he take the bait? Would he turn those stones into stone ground wheat bread? No he didn't. Instead, he quoted scripture back to the devil, didn't he? And Charlie reminded us of that last week to put our put to hide God's Word in our hearts, to remember it so when we need it, it's there for us.

And Jesus said to the devil, no, no, man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. And so he didn't get him on that one. So he's going to try another one. If you are the Son of God, here we go again. Prove it. And he shows him this beautiful vision of being way up on top of the Temple in Jerusalem and the holy city.

And he says, throw yourself down because you know the angels will catch you. Doesn't God's Word say in Psalm 91 that the angels will catch you, and they won't even let you dash your foot

against a stone? Here the devil finally decides to quote scripture as well, thinking he's going to get him this time. No, Jesus says no, thou shalt not test the Lord your God.

He put that aside. And then finally the devil comes. And as the prince of this world, he can actually say this. He can say, we're up on this high mountain together. Jesus, look at this. All the kingdoms of this world, all their splendor, are yours. All you have to do is bow down and worship me.

And Jesus says, thou shalt worship the Lord your God and him only. And then he said, get away from me, Satan. Buzz off! In today's parlance, and the devil leaves him. And I know from other scriptures it says for a more opportune time it's not the end of his temptations, but here is Jesus obeying the father's will. Unlike the nation of Israel, who was led out into the desert not for 40 days and 40 nights, but 40 years, and who turned against God at every point, rebelled, complained, made a golden calf to worship, did everything they weren't supposed to do.

Our sin nature like Adam and Eve as well. Just falling for that serpent's testing and temptation.

And so I wonder, I wonder what you're struggling with right now in terms of temptation. We all struggle. Jesus struggled with temptation, son. Though he was, he was tempted as well, but he did not sin. So what are you struggling with? What are you holding on to? What is what is whispering in your ear about? Oh, you're not really a beloved child of God.

Look at you. You're a mess. You can't do this. You can't do this that I'm calling you to do. You don't have the strength to do it. Or why don't you be angry and really just cut off from that person? Why don't you just leave the church? Why don't you do this? Why don't you do that? These temptations, these accusations, these condemnation, deception and harassment.

Those are the tools of the enemy. Where are you struggling at the beginning of this Lenten season? It's a time, brothers and sisters, to turn again, to keep turning as we did, as we kept turning in our procession this morning with the great litany to turn again to the Lord and say, help me, Lord, good Lord, deliver me, good Lord, deliver me from this temptation, from this trap.

Give me grace to stand. And if I fall, Lord, turn again and ask for his forgiveness. That's why we have this scripture today at the beginning of our Lenten season, that we can turn again to the Lord again and again and again, as many times as we need to. This is a word that was given to the church in Leticia in the book of Revelation chapter three.

When we say we don't need God, listen to this. The angel of the church write this I know your works. You are neither cold nor hot wood, that you were either cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm and neither cold or hot, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say I'm rich, I have, I have prospered, I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked.

I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich in white garments, so that you may clothe yourself, and the shame of your nakedness not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see brothers and sisters. That's a word for us this lent that we turn again to God in whatever state we're in, because we need a Savior.

John Newton. At the end of his life, the man who drove slave ships across the Atlantic, who also wrote the words to the song amazing Grace, said this I am a great sinner, and Christ is a great Savior.

So let's just take a moment and opportunity to turn again to the Savior. I don't know about you, but I have some things I need to turn to him about this lent. Some things that I need to let go of, some things that I need to be freed of, some things that I need to repent of, some things where I need his help.

And so if it helps you to do this, it helps me to do something physical, to put those things into your hands and just hold your hands balled up like this, like a fist. Would you do that for me? For God? Actually, not for me.

Put those things in your fist and feel yourself grasping on to them like, I'm going to fix this. I'm responsible. I can do all this, whatever it is in your life. No you can't. You need help. And so

when you're ready, Jesus is standing right in front of you saying, come to me, all who labor, come to me, come to me.

And so hand those literally open your hands and hand all of that. Now over to him who is indeed a great Savior.

And, Lord Jesus, would you receive these from our hands? And would you work in our hearts this day to turn again to you again and again, and work in our minds? Lord, that we hear only your voice and pay only attention to your voice that calls us your beloved in Christ, that calls us to you and calls us out into the world to be Christ's hands and feet in this world that needs him so much.

Jesus, we pray this in your mighty name. Amen.