

## **The Rev. Dr. Sandi Kerner**

So I was tempted to come out here and preach in front today. We'll see. We'll see how that goes.

Good morning. Good to see you. Thank you for enduring the very long great litany because it's great. But it's also great. And yet we begin this season with that kind of intentionality and penitence and turning again and again to the Lord. Why? Because we need him. We absolutely need him. I talk to you this morning a little bit about George Whitfield, a character, an Anglican priest from the 1700s.

He was an itinerant preacher because he was turned away from so many pulpits. He was over in the British Isles first in Ireland, preached many places. And when he would go into a pulpit and he would start his preaching, it was always with great theatrics and crying and shouting and stomping his feet and clapping his hands and, well, you know, Anglicans decently in northern order, didn't really like that kind of performance in the pulpit.

And so he was turned away again and again. So finally he went out into the highways and byways, literally. He went out to town squares. He went out to fields and he began preaching out in the open, and thousands upon thousands of people came to hear him. He was definitely entertaining, that's for sure. But also, I think the Spirit of God was drawing people to this man because he was offering something that they weren't hearing.

They weren't receiving by sitting in their pews. He made 13 trips across the Atlantic. Think about that in the 1700s. And it's said that he preached 18,000 sermons. Can you imagine? That's a lot of sermonizing. He said later in life, I'd rather wear out than rust out. That was his way of saying, I'm not done yet. In fact, he preached his last sermon the night before he died, and overnight he succumbed to asthma and died.

That man just would not be stopped. And he he's always associated with this revival in our country called the Great Awakening. That was kind of his claim to fame. And he certainly fanned

the fires of that movement. Along with the Wesley brothers. He also was associated with this term of talking about the sleeping church, the sleeping giant, the church.

And he said this the Christian world is in a deep sleep. Nothing but a loud shout can awaken them out of their slumber. And so his job, he felt God had called him, and it was his passion to rouse complacent Christians to get rid of spiritual complacency and to wake up the sleeping giant. There's one story that's told about him.

He was preaching in a church in America, kind of on a morning like this. It was sleepy and rainy, and people were just in their pews, barely there. They were kind of nodding off, and one man right there in the front row. I'm glad nobody's there today. But one man right there in the front row started to slumber, and you could hear him sleeping.

And so George Whitefield stopped right in the middle of his sermon. He stopped and he pounded. Excuse me. Altar. He pounded the pulpit, and he stomped his feet so that the whole wooden church just shook. And the guy jolted out of his seat and he said, I come in the name of the Lord of hosts. The guy just went, oh, yeah.

Amen. I mean, obviously going to say, but that was his job, that he felt that was his calling in that time. And think about it, it was right before and during the American Revolution that he was preaching. He was trying to wake up the people, to be awake to what God was doing in the world, and especially the Great Awakening.

He wanted to say to people, look, you are in need of a Savior. You need a Savior. You have sinned. You have fallen short of the glory of God. And think about the great litany we just rehearsed. How many sins are listed in there? Well, we pray, good Lord, deliver us. Be a great examination of conscience to go back through those four pages and pray through them and say, Lord, deliver me, forgive me, and turn again and again and again to God.

That's what this season of lent is all about. And so George was calling people to stand literally under the cross, to know the weight of their sin, and to also know the glory that the love of God

poured out, that blood coming down from the cross upon each one, that we, each one, would find him mighty to save us.

That's the God we have. And he's calling us back to not just through George, but in this season. We begin lent every year with Ash Wednesday, and we come forward and we receive those ashes on our forehead in the sign of the cross. I like to think that it marks the same place where we're baptized, or we're baptized with chrism, with water, and then we're signed with chrism, with holy oil, and we're told you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism, and you are marked as Christ's own forever.

And then in lent, we also do a litany of penitence where we again confess our sins. So I think the season of lent is offered to us in the church, whether it's Ash Wednesday and the ashes signifying our mortality, that we only have a short time left in this world, whether it's the Great Litany where we process and we sing and we chant and we say, good Lord, deliver us.

And then we say, we beseech you to hear us, good Lord. About ten of those positions are repentance, and the other 20 are where we ask God to help us join him in His rule and reign. And establishing that rule and reign in this earth. It's a great, examination of conscience. Again, I would recommend it to you highly.

And so the first Sunday of Lent, we also always begin with Jesus temptation. It's either in Matthew, Mark, or Luke where we hear the story of Jesus, who is just literally dripping wet, coming out of the waters of baptism by John in the Jordan River, and either being led or mark as being thrown out into the wilderness. Yes.

And the reason why to be tempted by Satan. And so he's out there and he's fasting for 40 days and 40 nights long, 40 nights in the desert. And when you think of this desert, do not think of sand everywhere. Think of rocks. Millions and millions and millions of rocks out there. It's not a comfortable place. It's not a place you go like a Holiday Inn or Embassy Suites.

This. This is hard stuff out there. And he's not eating. So any kind of comfort from food he does not receive either. And in that space, in that place, the devil comes at an opportune time when

he's famished, when he's starving, when he's weak, when he's hungry, when he's tired, and the devil comes to him and tempts him with deception.

First, he's the great deceiver. And he says to Jesus, if you are the Son of God.

Just moments ago, he was dripping wet out of the waters of the Jordan. And he came out. And the father said to him, what? This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased. And already out in the desert, Satan is saying, well, if you are the Son of God, then why don't you just turn these stones into bread?

And Jesus, resist the temptation with Scripture, which is why Charlie admonished us last week to begin to memorize scripture, to be able to fight the devil back. And Jesus says, but man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. No, I'm not going to turn the stones into bread. I'm not going to make stone ground wheat bread out here in the desert.

This is not for me. In fact, Jesus will go on to satisfy the hunger of many, not his own. Think about it. How many times as he multiply bread in the scriptures? At least two that we know of. Probably more. He also stands and says to the disciples in John chapter six, I am the bread of life.

And then at the Last Supper he takes the bread, the Passover bread, and he says, this is my body, which I will give for you.

And so Jesus is tempted to derail that whole mission and take it upon himself and just satisfy his own hunger. And he says, no, no man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from God's mouth. So then Satan tries again. Again there's a deception. If you are the Son of God, he didn't get him the first time.

Or try again. If you are the Son of God and he gives him this picture of the temple and he says, go up there, go up to the very top of the temple, the pinnacle, and throw yourself down,

because doesn't Scripture say that his angels will catch you and you won't even dash your foot against a stone? This time the devil's quoting scripture.

And Jesus also sees through it and says, no, no, that's not the way to go. No, we do not test the Lord. Our God.

Think about it. How many times in the desert did Israel, God's son, test? God, tested God and tempted him so many times. They grumbled because they were hungry. They grumbled because they were thirsty. They grumbled. They made a golden calf to worship. When Moses didn't come down from the mountain, they just one thing after another were stiff necked to God.

And so there's the disobedient son. Just like the disobedience of Adam and Eve, because Satan also tempted them, didn't he? Well, did God really say, you shouldn't eat of that tree?

And it introduced doubt and deception. The devil is a liar, a cheat, a robber, and one who wants to kill. But they fell for it and Israel fell for it. But this Son of God, the second Adam in Jesus, does not fall, does not fall. And so the third temptation comes. Satan says, look at this beautiful world. He takes him to a high mountaintop.

All of this. I'll give you all the splendor of this world, if you will bow down and worship me. And you know that there's a bit of truth in that. He's called the prince of this world for a reason. In John's gospel. And Jesus immediately says, away with you, Satan. Buzz off today's language. No, don't worship the Lord.

Your God and serve him only. Only. And then the angels came. Scripture says, and waited on him.

So, brothers and sisters, let's take some lessons from Jesus in this desert. Let's wake up during this Lenten season. Let us wake up to what keeps us from God, what keeps us where we are powerless to change. I don't know about you, but I got a couple areas I need to offer to God today. Places where I've tried to change.

I've purpose to change. And I keep falling and failing. Keep turning my back on him. So again, it's an opportunity to repent. It's an invitation. So I invite you today to do something with me. Put your hand out or both hands out, and hold on really tightly to whatever. Whatever holds on to you that you can't seem to let go of.

Is it a lie about who you are that your beloved son or daughter of God in Christ? Is it about some failing that you can't let go of? Is it about anger, or is it about a resentment you don't want to let go of?

Is it about no God, I'll do everything but that for you. What is it that holds you? So hold on to it for just a minute. Really tightly.

And when you're ready. Jesus is here. He's with us in our wilderness. He does not ever fail us or forsake us. He is right here. And he knows what it is to be tempted in everything. But he didn't sin.

And so when you're ready, open your hands and give whatever that is to Jesus, and turn again to him. Stand under his cross again, and let his blood and his love, and the power of his spirit come and fill you, so that you can walk in newness of life, even in this life. So, Lord Jesus, we give you all of these things and we ask you to work in our hearts in this lent and turn us again and again and again to you, because you are gracious, oh, lover of souls, and we find you mighty to save us.

In your name we pray. Amen.