

**Bible Study**  
**First Sunday in Lent, Year A**  
**March 5, 2017**

**[RCL] Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11**

**Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7**

On Ash Wednesday, God's people were exhorted to begin the observance of a Holy Lent. The discipline of Lent is to be more than merely giving up a favorite dessert or trying to exercise more. Rather, the church is called to a self-reflective season of contrition and confession, of turning again to God, and submitting wholly to God. The first lesson from Genesis gives a name to the enemy we are likely to encounter as we attempt to meet the demands of Lent: temptation.

In the character of the serpent, this lesson paints a portrait of temptation. The lesson not only teaches us that temptation is crafty, but also in what ways it is crafty. Two stand out. Perhaps the most pernicious aspect of temptation is highlighted when the serpent says to Eve, "You will not die, but your eyes will be opened." Temptation can be recognized because in its craftiness, it will mix a truth into its lie to make the lie more palatable.

The lesson also teaches us that it is the quality of temptation to spread. No sooner has Eve eaten of the forbidden tree than does she tempt Adam to sin as well. The sin of temptation is not content to sit still, but, like a plague, thrives when it spreads from one person to another until it has infected everyone. To resist temptation, we should be able to recognize when we have been tempted, and resist when we feel the pull to tempt others.

- Where have you faced temptation in your life? How have you helped to spread temptation?
- Where do you recognize truths and lies being mixed together in your spiritual life? How will you resist?

**Psalm 32**

Psalm 32 is about one of the central disciplines of Lent: confession. For those of us who are used to confessing our sins in the generic words of the general confession we say each Sunday, the concept of naming our sins out loud before God may seem somewhat foreign. But as the psalmist says: "While I held my tongue, my bones withered away." The weight of unconfessed sin becomes unbearable until finally we have no choice but to shout it out before God. Only then, according to the psalmist, is the guilt of sin forgiven.

- Reflect on the particular sins you might need to confess.
- Why do you think the psalmist claims that confessing sins leads to their forgiveness?

**Romans 5:12-19**

In this passage from Romans, Paul makes the claim that "Adam was the type of the one to come," meaning Christ. However, in Christ, the type is turned on its head. Just as many have died through the sin of Adam, in Christ, many have been afforded the free gift of grace. Just as through one man's

trespass, death gained dominion over the world, one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. If Lent is to be a season of turning again to God, of reorienting ourselves, then this epistle passage provides a sort of road-map to that reorientation. Through the demanding spiritual disciplines of Lent, we look away from our old life in the world of Adam's sin, to the new life that is afforded in Christ. We travel through the dark season of Lent, in the hope and expectation that new life in Christ waits on the other side.

- How might it be possible to observe the demands of the Lenten season without losing sight of the hopefulness that waits on the other side of it?

### **Matthew 4:1-11**

This passage from Matthew provides the rationale for the Lenten season. As Christ went into the wilderness for forty days and forty nights, we are exhorted to spend forty days and forty nights in earnest prayer, contrition, and confession. We are reminded that even in the midst of our own struggles and temptations, we are in Jesus' company, and that is a very heartening thing indeed. We cannot escape the darkness of the Lenten season, or the agony that will come on Good Friday, but we can move forward in the confidence that Jesus is with us in all of it. Just as angels came and waited on Jesus in the wilderness, Jesus waits on us as we undergo the forty days of Lent that are the preparation for the Easter celebration.

- In what ways do you sense Jesus ministering to you throughout the trials not only of the Lenten season, but of your life?

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