

## **“Enough”**

(Luke 4)

Like fingernails racing down a chalk board, there are certain topics within the church that cause our souls to quiver as we restlessly shift from side to side in the pews. We experience that kind of discomfort when differing points of views and disagreements turn to raised voices and anger coated words are exchanged in our sacred space. We experience that kind of discomfort when we see someone who hurt us and the scar from that broken unable to be reconciled relationship starts to throb. There are even some words that when they leap from this lofty pulpit, they come at our unsuspecting ears with such force we immediately assume the defensive position or try to shield our hearts and minds. Temptation is one of the words that when it leaves my lips feels too heavy to be supported by the fragile airwaves. Often our modern minds quickly respond to counterbalance the weight of that word. When a heavy churchy word like temptation enters our ears, starts to roam chaotically around our minds stirring up emotions and awakening memories best left dormant and undisturbed, it can be like a six year old and four year old on a Valentine's sugar rush running around your living room (just to pull a completely random example). In order to regain control, we start evasive mental maneuvers immediately. We might begin to contemplate what seeds to plant this spring or glancing at the soothing wave like red fabric over our heads and begin to think about that time we were on the beach in Hawaii. Temptation is a difficult, almost dangerous word, because honestly friends we've heard that sermon before.

We know the story line. The pastor will proclaim the grave evils of temptation, maybe even pound the pulpit for emphasis with a stern frown. Naming even a few of the universal temptations that exist in our world, nimbly the pastor shifts to the scene in the Gospel, claiming that Jesus himself faced temptation, faced the very personification of evil, which in and of itself causes us to picture some guy in a red suit with horns and a pitch fork. But we cannot linger too long with that image because suddenly we notice that the sermon moved on, now the pastor is talking about the way Jesus stealthily used scripture which was no match for evil and you too can face down temptation just like Jesus. Equipped with “just say no” and buoyed by a “yes I can” spirit, we send people out into the world only to find we are not like Jesus. Our ability to summon super spiritual strength when we stare at our own personal temptations can leave us feeling like Superman standing too close to kryptonite. In that moment, our “no” suddenly sounds weak and hallow, almost laughable. I've sat through this sermon, perhaps inadvertently even preached it a time or two, and realize that for me when temptation wanders through the door of my life suddenly all those sermonizing words seem to be off on a coffee break.

Something gets lost in translation when we start talking about the temptation of Jesus. We look at the way Jesus was able to be a lone ranger in the face of temptation and we conclude (unfortunately I might add) that we too should be able to overcome those places that lead us away from wholeness on our own. We get caught up in a sort of spiritualized version of ‘pull yourself up by your own bootstraps’ kind of thinking. Honestly, I don't often possess such spiritual strength. Self-help groups long ago abandoned such individualized, you can do it all on your own trap. Groups that now meet in church basements to listen to and support each other through the trials and tribulations of wrestling with the temptations of addictions like alcohol, sex, over eating, drugs, and other choices that can create chaos in our lives and in our relationships often do a better job of equipping and supporting people

than most sermons ever will. Rarely are we able to control the elephants of temptation in our life all alone. But the rub can be finding people who are willing to journey with us, the rub can be finding the courage to be vulnerable and name our temptations out loud to another as we nervously await their response.

Moreover, trying to equate the temptations Jesus faced with the ones we face as individuals can also get mixed up in translation. Up to this point, no one has wandered back to my office asking me to turn stones into bread, thus far no one has invited me to the UCC conference office in DeForest or the national office in Cleveland and shown me the glory of the UCC to control, no one has, nor ever will I might add, taken me to the top of the bell tower here at our church shown me all of Janesville to be mine, all mine! The temptations Jesus faced in the wilderness were the ones he faced throughout his ministry. But those are not the temptations I wrestle with.

One of the places I struggle mightily with in my life is taking on too much or trying to put into practice the spiritual art of saying “no”. I seem to have a fondness for collecting responsibilities for myself the way sane people collect Packer’s merchandise or my mother collected tiny tea cups from each of the touristy places we visited when I was young. Need someone to move a table, I’d be delighted. Need someone to gather honey from the bee hives, even though I am allergic to bees, sure why not? I dare say if Ringling Brothers showed up tomorrow at church and said they needed a minister to feed the lions while they are in town, I’d go home all excited to tell Gina. The reality is, that while I mentally understand that Jesus faced his own personal temptations, trying to translate his responses into my own life is just plain difficult. When someone asks me to help out on a committee, it just doesn’t make sense for me to say, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’ Although, it might make that person reconsider and even rescind the invitation to help out. And so I, like Jesus, need to find an authentic way to face those places in my life that lead to down unhealthy pathways. I, unlike Jesus in our reading, know that I will need help in the process.

Naming out loud to others where we need help is a good starting point. Naming out loud to a trusted friend to keep us accountable when we start to get caught up in our own busyness or having someone to call when we are staring at a bottle is a good starting point. Yet, there is no guarantee that this alone will enable us to live out those honest words of the Lord’s Prayer we utter every week, “lead us not into temptation”. So, where does that leave us? First, the very nature of temptation means there is no one and done kind of face off moment, temptations linger. It is important to keep in mind that just because Jesus was able in the wilderness to seemingly fend off the temptations barely breaking a sweat, there were other moments when Jesus did struggle. Jesus is confronted with a foreign woman who asks for healing for her daughter and he talks about dogs and we feel the bread of life turn to stone. Jesus wanders into the temple and anger erupts in the form of turning over tables. He fingers a coin trying to figure out what to say on the issue of taxes. Temptations linger, which is why one moment our “no” feels so strong and the very next moment seems to lose any and all authority. We need others to help us in the journey of life when we get mired in the muck and mud of temptation.

So may you find ways to seek out and support one another as each of us face the realities of temptations. May you resist formulaic responses and easy answers to the complexities that temptation confronts us with. Through honesty and openness may that help release some of the guilt and stigmas that too often tags along in our conversations

concerning our own temptations. As we journey together, sometimes encountering the mucky mud of temptation, it is through our mutual affection and affirmation of each other that we can help transform temptations into moments when we can be steeped in the sacred. May it be so for you and for me as I try to stop collecting responsibilities and start finding ways to respond to God's grace and strength and love in this world.

Thanks be to God and let the people of God say, "Amen!"