

2nd of Lent, first of Treasure series
March 16, 2014, Boone UMC
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Alone

I can't tell you how happy I am to be standing up here talking to you. I was in Rwanda for a Sunday and was supposed to be in Guatemala for two Sundays, but instead had a little back surgery and a stomach bug. I want to thank you for how kind you were to me and my family during my travel and illness. Dave Rowe teased me that in the National Football League, the pros play hurt, because they know their backups are good. And my backups here are good—thank you to my wife Jaylynn, to guest preacher Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, to Gene Ammons.

I feel like giving up doctors for Lent.

There are at least two ways to approach Lent. One is to give something up. This is a sign that our real goal as Christians is to give up sinning—hurting ourselves and hurting others and hurting God. Or, this can be harder, you can *take up* something for Lent. You can *add* a practice. I'll pray every day in Lent. Read the devotional from church everyday on Facebook or in the booklet out there in the back. As a church, *we* are giving things up for Lent. We've been asked to do away with something that matters to us that we spend money on, to pool that money, and to give it to missions on Easter. The \$4 I spend on a Stickboy sticky bun adds up over the course of Lent to \$184—that's a lot. Others of you have given up coffee, beer, salt and pepper, carbonated beverages. These things are not sinful. They are good things. And when we miss them, we long for them, that longing reminds us that our deepest longing is for God.

Today pastor Vern in Crossroads and I in here begin a six week series on Treasure, all the way through Easter. And you can thank Vern for this—notice the reading in a minute is just four verses long. It's like Lent, a smaller portion, a more modest serving. None of my 'here's 25 verses and a 9 point sermon' stuff, just one idea today really. Treasure. And one question.¹ What do we need to give up to have more of Jesus?

I propose that during Lent we also *take up* this practice as a church. It's a gospel processional. I'll process down among you to read the gospel. As I do we'll sing a song together and you'll turn and face the bible. When I finish we'll turn back to the front and sing the same song again. Just as Jesus is God not far removed but among us, so too the Word in scripture is in our midst. Friends let us stand in the presence of our king.

Matthew 4:1-4 (quoting Deut 8:3)

4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. 3 The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." 4 But

¹ Next sentence on screen plz

he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

This is the word of God, it belongs to you, the people of God, **thanks be to God.**

When I first got appointed to Boone Methodist I did some research on you. I listened to a sermon by John Fitzgerald, my predecessor, your former senior pastor. And guess what John preached on? Matthew 4. I'll never forget what John said. He said he *wished* the devil appeared to us like he appears to Jesus in this story. Presumably wearing red, with horns and a pitchfork and the smell of burning sulfur. Because if he did, resisting temptation would be easy.² Look at that guy. If you saw him you'd say, 'Oh, devil, right, don't listen.' But resisting temptation is never that easy. In fact, if you listen carefully to the gospel story, *it doesn't say* the devil had any of those identifying marks. It just says he tempted Jesus. And here's one thing it means to be tempted. It means to seek the right thing the wrong way. The devil says Jesus should eat. Food is good. There is no human life without food or drink. It is often said that Jesus eats his way through the gospels. You can't find a page of the gospels where Jesus isn't eating. Except this page. John Calvin said it's a sign of the goodness of God that food tastes good. It could all taste like gruel or energy bars but instead we get shrimp bisque and pecan pie and bacon cheeseburgers and zucchini pizza. If God wasn't good food wouldn't taste like a miracle. But it does. There is nothing wrong with food or drink. Just like there's nothing wrong with coffee or beer or salt or pepper or carbonated beverages or sticky buns. The tempter offers Jesus the right thing in the wrong way.

So no pitchfork, no horns, just temptation. Testing. One thing we can be sure of—if we spend our lives with Jesus we will be tempted and tested. It's a sign of faithfulness really.³ The gospel I read says "Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." Actually that's not strong enough.⁴ A better translation would be "Jesus was *driven* by the Spirit into the wilderness." The Spirit of God wants Jesus tempted. And wants us tempted. Those who are drawing near to God will be tested and tempted. Like Jesus was. If you're anxious, nervous, tempted, tested, take heart. That means you're drawing closer to God.

Jesus is in the wilderness forty days and forty nights. This is epic time—Noah's ark bobbed on the waters forty days and forty nights. Israel wandered in the wilderness forty years. Moses fasted in the wilderness forty days and forty nights. Here's what it's saying: Jesus is Israel all over again. He is in the wilderness a long long time, forty somethings. And he is hungry. The tempter offers him a good thing. Bread. "So, since you're the Son of God and all, you can make these stones into bread. So, go ahead." This is no bad thing the tempter tempts Jesus with. Bread is good. Jesus later multiplies bread to feed 4000, 5000, he breaks bread with his disciples at his Last Supper, *we* meet him in bread at this table, he calls himself the Bread of Life. 'So just make a little more. Here are some stones.'

The *Lord of the Rings* illustrate this temptation perfectly. The ring of power can do marvelous things. It can make you invisible, it can let you see things. With it, you can rule. But then

² <http://www.devilspice.com/Devil.gif>

³ Matthew 4:1 on screen plz

⁴ Put this translation on screen plz

eventually, it rules you, makes you less, owns you, enslaves you.⁵ Only a little bitty hobbit can carry the ring, because he is less tempted to power. Wizards, humans, elves, in all their majesty cannot resist. The whole point of that marvelous series of books and movies is this: you can't use immoral means to moral ends. You can't. Because then you've done an immoral thing and the game is lost. "All that is gold does not glitter," the movie jokes wisely. What no one else could resist, Frodo throws into the fires of Mt. Doom. With a little accidental help from Gollum, his worst enemy.

Here's another way to think of evil (with no elves). A friend never went on dates in college. But his roommate did all the time. He couldn't figure out why—his roommate wasn't any more attractive, richer, funnier than he was. So he asked. His roommate answered, "Want to know my secret?" "Yes I do." "The secret is, I tell them whatever they want to hear." That's evil. Telling them whatever they want to hear. Here it's not that you want the right thing by the wrong means. It's that you don't care what the right is and just use people.

You see this all the time. With power comes temptation. Think of the candidate who gets elected and has real power finally. Now he doesn't actually have to listen. He can just do what he wants. Write people off. Use them. Fire them because he never liked them anyway and hire his friend instead. But wait, what about the people he ran to serve, even love, make their lives better?

I've seen this in academia as folks gather power. The people they used to work with, and now work over, cease to be a mystery. They think they know what everybody wants and don't have to listen anymore. Or, try tax time. Some people, I'm told, not any of us, but some people would find it really easy to fib a little on taxes and save money. None of those *goals* is bad. None—saving money, getting a better job, getting elected, leading. Power is a good thing. Power is there to set people free, to help institutions flourish. But when power becomes a means to a private or harmful or illegal or sinful end. Well. Then it's doing what might be the right the thing wrong way. Or turning stone into bread.

Let me clear something up in this passage. And it will require playing the Greek card again, forgive me. "If you are the Son of God," the tempter says. But that's not quite right. A better translation would be "Since you are the Son of God." The tempter assumes Jesus *is* the Son of God. Everybody knows that, even the demons. The question is what does that mean? How will the Son of God use his power? To serve himself? To do magic tricks to impress people? Napoleon said that an army marches on its stomach. If you can feed people from rocks you can raise an army from dust. Will Jesus take over that way and make everyone behave by force? I remember the movie *Dead Man Walking* where Sean Penn plays a convicted murderer and Susan Sarandon is a nun trying to reach him before he dies. She asks him what he thinks of Jesus. He says, "Good man, got killed, son of God." You see how he said "Son of God" without meaning it? She says "That's right, and they killed him." "Sort of like me?" he said. "No," she said. "Not at all like you." The question is not if we check a box that asks *whether* Jesus is the Son of God. The question is what we mean by that.

⁵ http://4.bp.blogspot.com/YaowUzQz4HE/S96_mC5viWI/AAAAAAAAAMw/4I_1c-PgClS/s1600/lord_of_the_rings_the_fellowship_of_the_ring_ver1_xlg.jpg

⁶ Mt 4:3 on screen plz.

⁷ Flash this up now, with italics.

As the scene of temptation opens, we realize have been here before.⁸ Adam and Eve had absolutely everything they needed in the garden. It was luscious, beautiful, glorious. And the tempter came.⁹ And asked “Did God really say that?” Is it really so luscious, beautiful, gorgeous here? Maybe God is holding back on you. Maybe God is not as good as he says he is. Maybe maybe maybe. And they eat.¹⁰ And fall. And all has been ruin since.

Now Jesus is in the wilderness. Not a garden—things are too far gone for that. The same tempter comes. We, the audience watching this movie have seen this scene before. You know how at the end of a scary movie the critter or badguy is never actually dead? He always jumps out one last time? Well, we’ve seen this sort of movie before, we know the convention, and every time the tempter turns up everything gets worse. Surely this man will fall like Adam. He will do what the tempter says and all will be ruined again.

¹¹But Jesus doesn’t fall. He stands. The expected outcome does not occur. The scene doesn’t end the way it “always” does. Jesus, the new Adam, resists temptation. He triumphs.

And this is good news. Here’s why. Some of you know this pattern. When you’re tempted you resist for a bit. Then it becomes harder. Then you give in. And you feel ruined. The bottle or the lust or the drug or the pride get the better of you. They always do. Better get used to failure and not expect too much. You just get disappointed.

But Jesus *resists*. He doesn’t fall. He breaks the pattern. The whole story can be different. *Now* it is possible for the story to turn out well. We don’t have to be ruined by temptation. We can resist. Not by ourselves. But by clinging to him. *He’s* the one who rises from the dead. We put our arms around him and are along for the ride.

How does Jesus do it?¹² One, he quotes scripture.¹³ “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” The quote comes from the book of Deuteronomy, where God reminds the people about the 40 years they have been together.¹⁴ “Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” Jesus knew his bible. So when the tempter came calling Jesus could quote the bible and deflect that temptation. Here’s the story from Deuteronomy: God *let* Israel experience hunger, so Israel would know that God is more important than food. How long can you hold your breath? Some of you

⁸ [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3e/Jan Brueghel %28I%29 - Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden - WGA03584.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3e/Jan_Brueghel_%28I%29_-_Adam_and_Eve_in_the_Garden_of_Eden_-_WGA03584.jpg)

⁹ [http://lukearredondo.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Adam and Eve in Garden Michelangelo1.jpg](http://lukearredondo.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Adam_and_Eve_in_Garden_Michelangelo1.jpg)

¹⁰ [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e6/Masaccio - The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden %28detail%29 - WGA14180.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e6/Masaccio_-_The_Expulsion_from_the_Garden_of_Eden_%28detail%29_-_WGA14180.jpg)

¹¹ <http://timgombis.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/temptation.jpg>

¹² 1. Jesus quotes scripture

¹³ Mt. 4:4 on screen plz.

¹⁴ Deuteronomy 8:2-3 on screen plz.

longer, some of you shorter. Should we try in here now? No. None of us can hold our breath very long, we need oxygen. But God is still more important than oxygen. Same with water. Love. Work. Friendship. Safety. A friend says “don’t take care, take risks.” We’ve all watched athletes do remarkable things—go without meals, exercise for days, cycle for hundreds of miles. For what? Because they love it more than they love comfort. Those are all good things. But no good thing is as good as God. If we try to worship anything other than God it will make us less human and kill us. Idols always do.

Two,¹⁵ Jesus resists the tempter by fasting. Going without. Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove when he preached for us Ash Wednesday described fasting well. He said it’s the opposite of slowing. When we fast we’re *into* something, so into it we can’t pull ourselves away. We’ll skip meals, forget to sleep, because she’s so beautiful, because the art is so glorious, because the basketball is so exciting. That’s fasting. We go without everything *because God is good enough*. And that’s why we go without in Lent. To remind ourselves that the one thing we *can’t* do without is God. It’s sometimes put this way, forgive me if you’ve heard this before—we all have a God-shaped hole in our hearts. If we try to fill it with something else we can for a while. But it won’t satisfy. Only God fits perfectly. I’ve joked with you before that some of us get most of our fasting done between meals. But then I asked y’all to fast, so I had to. Tried to swear off sweets. That worked until I was confronted with a box of vanilla rice crispy treat oreos. Seen those things? Evil. Ok, notice the bag. Can’t have any. Won’t. Are you sure? Won’t do any harm. You can just ask God for forgiveness later. No one will know. Ok, just a few. Then God gave me a 24 hour stomach bug to get them out. Don’t do what I did, you don’t want that, trust me. I acted like the oreos were God. Something I have to have to be human, to stay alive, to be saved. But it’s just a bag of chemicals and trans fats. There is *nothing* we need more than God. Nothing. And you know what? A few weeks without sweets and I don’t even really want em anymore.

Three, even though Jesus was hungry he wasn’t *empty*.¹⁶ He was *full* of the Holy Spirit. He had just been baptized. The Spirit drenched him and a voice from heaven called him¹⁷ “My Son, the Beloved, with him I am well pleased.” This I think is the secret to resisting temptation. It’s to be so full of Jesus there’s no room for anything else.

A friend of mine imagines it this way—when she comes up for communion there’s a server there, like in our church, with a whole loaf of bread. The server says “the body of Christ, broken for you.” And my friend is hungry. She takes bread and eats it. Then she stands there. She doesn’t move on. She asks for another bite. “The body of Christ broken for you.” And another. And another. The body of Christ, broken for you. She imagines standing there until the whole loaf is gone. That’s how hungry she is for Jesus. She wants more of him, until he’s gone or she’s full.ⁱ I find I’m more inclined to be tempted when I’m empty. When I’m spent, feeling sorry for myself, unappreciated, selfish. When I’m full of Jesus, when I’m thinking about serving others and not myself, I barely notice the tempter at all. Just long enough to drop some bible on him.

¹⁵ Jesus resists by fasting

¹⁶ Jesus resists by being full.

¹⁷ On screen plz.

Our series theme is treasure. And I've barely touched on that theme here today. A treasure is something we cherish, something we sacrifice for, something that shows who we are. I have a basketball signed by all members of the 1986 Duke basketball team—Coach K's first Final Four. I got it with my mom who I love and miss. It's flat, in the basement, it won't inflate again, but I treasure it. I treasure my kids more. My wife still more. They're all good things, worthy treasures, worth giving one's life for (the ball not so much). Here's the question then, what do we treasure right now that we need to give up to make more room for Jesus? What do we treasure right now that we need to give up to make more room for Jesus? That's a hard question, forgive me. But Lent is a season for hard questions. Amen.

¹ It's Enuma Okoro's image.