

Wesley United Methodist Church

February 14, 2016

"Temptation."

Luke 4:1-14

Have you noticed how on some signs the message which was intended isn't the one that comes across? Like the one in the department store which announced "Bargain Basement Is Upstairs." Or the one with the mistranslation, at least I hope. The sign in a Paris hotel read: "Please leave your values at the front desk." I'm sure they meant valuables. Unfortunately, many people do that without being told. And sometimes we are tempted to leave our values somewhere else, too. Jesus even faced that kind of temptation every day. This morning we begin our Lenten Journey with Jesus, we travel with him into the wilderness where he was tempted over and over again. Let's look at Luke's account:

Read Luke 4:1-14.

One of the unique things about the temptations is that they are recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke with much detail, which says to me that Jesus shared his struggle in the wilderness with the disciples. He wanted both, them and us, to know that he faced the same temptations we face every day.

One of those areas of temptations is in the integrity department. It's a temptation we face every day. Every day we are tempted to make little decisions about what is right and wrong. It may be nothing more than borrowing a dozen paperclips, an ink pen, or some paper. It may be nothing more than running a red light because there isn't anyone around or shaving a stroke off your golf game or taking advantage of the waiter or waitress when they give you back too much change. It's not the big things that get us in trouble right away. It's all the little things, the little steps that lead us away from living in the center of our core values.

Sometimes the temptation is to do the right thing but for the wrong reason. There's a fictional story about Jesus and the disciples. It seems they were walking along a rocky road one day when Jesus asked each of them to pick up a stone and carry it for him. According to the story, John chose a large stone while Peter chose one that he could easily carry in his pocket.

Jesus then led the disciples to the top of a mountain where he continued to teach them. He ignored the stones until, about midday, tired and hungry, one of the disciples asked if there was anything to eat. Jesus told them to pick up the stones they had been carrying for him. Then he commanded the stones to become bread. Each disciple was allowed to eat the bread he held in his hand. Much to his chagrin, Peter's portion of bread was barely a mouthful, so John shared some of his bread with Peter.

Later that same day, as they were headed down the mountain along the same stony path. Jesus told the disciples to pick up and carry another stone for him. This time Peter picked up the largest stone he could find. He had trouble carrying it with one hand, it was so big.

Jesus led the disciples to a river. There he sat and taught them some more. Then Jesus did something strange, he told them to throw their stones in the water. They each did so, but nothing happened other than making big splashes. The disciples were bewildered. Then Jesus turned to them and asked a simple question, "For whom did you carry the stone?"

Part of what we are about, as disciples on the journey of faith together, is carrying stones for Jesus. Sometimes those stones will be turned into bread to nourish and satisfy. Other times we will simply be called upon to be obedient or faithful and carry the stone because it is expected.

One of the questions of our faith and our faithfulness will always be: "For whom do you carry the stone?" Is it for us or is it for Jesus. It's important that we do the right thing. But it is equally important to do the right thing for the right reason and purpose.

Finally, I think the worst temptation of all is to forget. We're tempted to forget that Jesus faced everything we face but did not give in. We forget two key verses found in the letter to the Hebrews, specifically Hebrews 2:18 "Because [Jesus] himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested." And Hebrews 4:15-16 "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us

therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Those verses are a call to remember, not forget. We're called to remember that Jesus is on our side. He knows everything there is to know about us and still loves us. He came to help us become like him. He came to help us be faithful and succeed in being faithful. In the midst of temptation, we're called to remember that.

No matter what your particular temptation involves, we're called to remember that we can "approach the throne of grace with boldness, in our time of need." Why? Because Jesus "is able to help those who are being tested." Jesus helps us remember just as he remembered in the wilderness when he was tempted and was faithful.

So what is it that's tempting you right now? What temptation has your life and your faith in turmoil right now? Whatever it is bring it with you when you come to worship him. Bring it with you and give it to him.

"Approach the throne of grace with boldness, in your time of need." Because Jesus "is able to help those who are being tested." Approach the throne of God, let go of that temptation and walk away lighter.