

## *On Whom or What Do You Rely?*

First Congregational Church, Branford

March 1, 2020; Psalm 91 Tempter & Lay Reader Dialogue; Luke 4:1-13

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Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness,<sup>2</sup> where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished.<sup>3</sup> The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”<sup>5</sup> Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”<sup>9</sup> Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’<sup>11</sup> and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”<sup>12</sup> Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Let us pray.

The Tempter was wrong about Psalm 91. It doesn't mean that God won't allow anything bad to happen to those who love God. It means that when you're in the toughest wilderness... *you're never without God*. God doesn't offer perfect protection, but he offers perfect presence. No perfection protection, but perfect presence.

The dialogue script said, *just wait til the preacher gets going*. I guess the preacher is supposed to rage at Satan and toss him out of here, give him what for, but I'm not feeling the need to prove my power.

Maybe because Lent... begins with weakness... *We stand in need of God*.

*We stand in need...*

Like Jesus did. Did you hear him, he kept acknowledging the One Greater than himself - the One who is greater than Satan. Amen?

God needed to see that Jesus would remember Who he belongs to before Jesus began his ministry. Do you belong to me? Are you mine? Or do you belong to Satan? Do you belong to the World? Could Jesus handle being deprived, could he handle being alone, could he handle being scared, could he handle when people hated him, could he handle his ego and pride. It turns out he could!

Lent begins with the question, "on whom or what do you rely." I used to rely on everything but God, it seemed. I'd mainly turn to food to get my needs met. I came to learn that I could transfer my need, my terrible longing for food, over to God, so that God could become my God, not food. The longing I felt to be *filled up* by food, booze, or sex was filled by God. That's why people, during Lent, often give up some food they're tantalized by, or liquor, or sex, or shopping, or tv, to prove to themselves, and to God, *that God is God alone*, that they belong to him, *and no other god*.

I've also relied on myself, thinking I have the POWER to control my husband and my son. A friend took me out to lunch a week ago and I was lamenting and worrying about something with Abe, how powerless I've felt in not being able to change something in his personality that I believed would result in a better life for him. Let me change you, Abe! You'll be happier! My friend saw my anguish and turmoil, and with a smile on his sweet face, he drilled into my head that there was nothing I could do to change Abe... Which is really something for a controller to hear, because... I get stuff done!, I take care of things!, I change courses!, I am who I am!... *see, tempted to think I'm God!* I'm God in your life, Abe, I've deemed who you need to be. My friend is in Al-Anon, a program that helps those who've been affected by alcoholism. Al-Anon shows its members the wisdom of... doing nothing. How meddling is not only unnecessary but often makes things worse. Al-Anon's expression is: *Don't just do something; sit there*. That's a remarkable thing for a doer to hear. Don't just do something; sit there. Stop meddling in someone else's life. They belong to God. They are a child of God. All those years trying to change certain things about Abe or Ken only ever filled me with anxiety. What happens is, the more you can't affect change, the harder at it you go, thinking at some point the person is going to change! Don't just do something; sit there. God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change.

In my worry, my Lenten discipline is to resist the temptation to do something; and instead to just sit there. Be still and know that God. Psalm 100 says: Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his

people, and the sheep of his pasture. It is he who has made us and not we ourselves. Be still and know that God.

When Satan tempts you to worry... when you're tempted to worry about the coronavirus... when you're tempted to worry about the stock market... sit there. Contemplate on Whom you rely... When you're uncomfortable, sit there, sit through it, instead of reaching for something that's going to make you feel better. First Congregational, just sit there.

Of course, Lenten disciplines are hard. The Tempter is always waiting in the wings. He sees how *hard* it is not to yell at your child or your spouse (go ahead and yell, you know you want to), how it's hard to forgive someone (don't forgive), hard to part with money, or goods, hard to do volunteer work, hard to let go of things that aren't good for you. It's *hard* not to fail during Lent, when it feels like we really need that piece of Devil's Food cake, or that glass of wine - something that's going to take the edge off, or be a reward for a hard day. If you give in, Satan feels like he won, but I want to say this to you, as a Minister of Grace, if you give in, forgive yourself for having weakness. The Good News is that God accepts you just as you are. The choir sang today:

Beneath the cross of Jesus  
I find a place to stand,  
And wonder at such mercy  
That calls me as I am;  
For hands that *should* discard me  
Hold wounds which tell me, "Come."  
Beneath the cross of Jesus  
My unworthy soul is won.

Jesus already won the battle. He was victorious.

We may not be able to defeat Satan like Jesus. But, the great thing, the really great thing is we have a savior who leads us, who encourages us to stare temptation in the face and move along. Doesn't it feel so good when you don't give in? Aren't you proud of yourself? You know that God is proud, too.

I know you heard the scripture: Satan, waiting in the wings, *will come back for that opportune time* with Jesus in the form of the chief priests, Pilate, and Herod who try to tempt Jesus to deny who he is, *and* when the soldiers at the foot of the cross try to tempt Jesus to save himself. Jesus wins again! He always wins!

**Remember**, while Satan is waiting the wings, who else is waiting there, too??????? Jesus!!!

Sit and know that the God in you is stronger than the devil outside of you.

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I pray we rely more on Jesus this Lent. Amen.

