## Matthew 4:1-11

Where are you in danger of being tempted by something that will separate you from God? That is the gist of today's readings from both Genesis and Matthew. As humans, although we want to react like Jesus, we often find ourselves reacting more like Eve. In Genesis Eve is being tempted by the devil disguised as a snake; in Matthew it is Jesus who faces the devil.

Yet isn't that how our temptations begin... we find ourselves in places where we ordinarily wouldn't be found. Usually the movement is so gradual we don't realize where we are until we look up and take stock. I once heard that we get to the dangerous place of temptation like sheep feeding with their head down work their way outside their fence. They eat a bit of grass, move on to the next clump of grass, then the next, all the time working their way toward a hole in the fence they didn't even realize was there. When all of a sudden they find themselves outside of the fence and in danger.

Unlike the sheep, Jesus, in today's gospel, intentionally went into the wilderness alone, sent by the Spirit to be tested, starting with a fast. 40 days is a very long fast, but there is significance in the number 40, which was commonly used to mean simply a long period of time. It rained for 40 days and 40 nights when the earth was flooded. The Israelites were in the desert for 40 years. Moses was alone on Mt. Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights. Elijah took 40 days to get to Mount Horeb. Jesus took 40 days of fasting and contemplation.

The basis of contemplative prayer is sitting quietly for 20 minutes listening for God. Most of us have a hard time just contemplating God for 20 minutes, can you imagine taking 40 days doing nothing but thinking on God? What happens when we sit down to commune with God? We think of things that need to be done, of people we should call, all sorts of things other than just listening for God take over our brain. Jesus did this for 40 days.

Eve had no reason for silent contemplation or fasting. Gathering food was her major task, and with the abundance of the garden it should not have been too difficult. But she got near that tree, and then the snake spoke to her. And she listened. They had a conversation. The snake told her the tree had good fruit. Eve replied if we eat, or even if we touch it, we will die. Well, God never told Adam and Eve they couldn't touch the fruit. Eve was embellishing. Satan knew that so he pressed just a bit harder telling her she wouldn't die, she'd just be more like God, able to tell good from evil. Maybe Eve thought that was a good thing, knowing good from evil, although I doubt she even knew the meaning of the terms since everything around her was good. But how did she get to the point where she wanted to do what was wrong? She put herself near the tree they weren't supposed to eat from, and then, when the snake asked her about it, she twisted what God had told them.

Jesus, on his meeting with the devil did not have a full stomach, and most likely didn't have anything in the wilderness that was edible. When the tempter came to him Jesus was at his physically weakest point thus far in his life, and he was good and hungry. So the first temptation was food... turn the stone into bread. Of course Jesus could have done that, after all he turned water into wine in one of the later miracle stories. Yet, even though he was weak from hunger, Jesus was spiritually full and did not give in to the temptation but replied to the tempter with scripture from Deuteronomy. Jesus knew he could not rely on his own power but needed God's sustaining presence to prepare him for what lay ahead.

How often when we have a problem presenting us do we do everything we know how to do to solve the problem, and when that doesn't work, we say, "I guess I will pray"? Prayer and reading the scripture is a starting point, not an ending point.

When the devil realized he wasn't going to win Jesus over with food, like he had Adam and Eve, he moved on to more tempting things. Throw yourself off this pinnacle of the temple, the highest point here in the city, he tempted saying, "You'll be ok. God will send angels to protect you." Again Jesus responds with scripture from Deuteronomy telling him we aren't to put God to the test. Jumping off the pinnacle would have made God prove he was on Jesus' side; it would have been trying to prove that God was with him, something that needed no proof.

What does that mean in our life today to put God to the test? There are two ways of testing God, one is perfectly fine and the other is not. God tells the Israelites to test him, when, in Micah he says to bring all the grain to the storehouse, and he will open the floodgates. It has everything to do with trusting God to provide for your needs. The other testing of God, was telling Israel not to put God to the test in Deuteronomy which involved the people doubting God to provide what they needed in the wilderness. When we test God in our doubt, we are not trusting that God will provide. It would be like us saying, "If you're real God, and I'm not sure you are, but if you are real, then I'm going to jump off this overpass into traffic and trust you that I won't get hurt."

The third test from the tempter regarded glory, looking successful in the world. "Look," the devil said, "if you bow down to me you can be in charge of all this.... You'll have riches and power, and you can be so proud of what you have accomplished." Jesus saw the devil for who he is and sent him away saying "only God deserves worship, not buildings, not power nor affluence, nor people, only God."

Matthew Myer Boulton in his commentary on today's gospel found on SALTproject.org sums it all up by saying, "Jesus' three responses don't just debunk the devil's temptations; they effectively declare the good news of the Gospel: Yes — God loves you, and loves us all! God is the One we are made to trust — with humility and grace — for nourishment, love, and guidance. Even as we, too, travel through the wilderness, every good gift in our lives is manna from heaven, our "daily bread" for which we can and should give thanks — and for which we can and should pray afresh each day, presuming nothing, with empty hands and humble hearts. For the God of grace is among us — and God's own child, Emmanuel, "God with us," walks at our side. In seasons of scarcity and plenty alike, God is the font of every blessing!" All Glory be to God.