

Lent 1 B  
St. Mark 1:9-15  
February 18, 2018  
St. George's Episcopal Church  
Fr. Chris

## The Temptations

"He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him."

When something is tempting, it usually portends some food item that we hope to savor and devour in the near future. When we talk about the word temptation, we think of something we probably should not be doing or at the very least might be unhealthy for us. Temptations are always there. Its what you do about them that matters.

When you feel you are alone and by yourself, you imagine maybe that you could do anything, or anything starts to tempt you as it presents itself. Jesus faced this when he wandered off into the wilderness after his Baptism in the Jordan River. Jesus went there to prepare for his ministry, and one of the things he did in the wilderness is wrestle with the human temptations he encountered. It was the last step in preparing for his public ministry. We know he did not choose the easy route.

The small voice in your head may say: It is not wrong if I don't get caught. Cheating is o.k. so long as you don't get caught. These modern excuses I have heard for the last twenty-five years, first from young people and then adults. If you get away with it, it's o.k.. We know what Jesus would have to say about this: "There is nothing hidden that shall not be revealed." This saying is even more relevant today than ever with all the old scandals airing on the news. When Jesus spoke these words they didn't have social media or 24 hour a day cable news.

'What ever became of sin?' was the title of a popular book 30 years ago. The answer is: nothing. Sin is still sin. There are no equivocations or excuses for it. Wrong is wrong. Sin is sin. Immoral is immoral. Just because you don't get caught doesn't mean it's not a sin or immoral or wrong.

Go ahead, what's one little cheat? It's o.k. It won't matter.

Go on, what's it matter? No one else will see you...it will be o.k.!

It doesn't matter if no one else sees you. And what you do in the dark and in secret, will eventually come to light. Besides, there are always two people there when you sin or succumb to the wiles of temptation, always.

I love the word wiles. The dictionary calls them "devious or cunning stratagems employed in manipulating or persuading someone to do what one wants." Check out the synonyms for the word: tricks, ploys, schemes, dodges maneuvers, subterfuges, lures, enticements' shenanigans, artifices, guile, cunning, craftiness. None of these words suggest moral or above board behavior.

In fact, they suggest a carefully laid trap into which you wander, and whether you escape depends on the choices you make.

From whence does evil come? Is it external or is it internal? Did the devil make you do it? Did Satan himself tempt you? Was it simply a matter of your choice? Many question whether there is an evil one, a devil in our midst. Most would feel as though this is a product of Hollywood films such as the Exorcist. The old aphorism still is borne out in our experience: "That there is a devil there can be no doubt; the question is whether he is trying to get in or out."

Do we wait until we are alone to do what we really want to do? I'm thinking of overeating or eating things we shouldn't be eating or drinking to excess... It would seem being alone raises the stakes for the wiles of temptation and lays the groundwork for many a poor soul to succumb. If no one else knows, then what difference does it make? But there are always two witnesses, even when we are supposing that we are alone. Unfortunately, that gets forgotten all too easily.

What about will-power? Will-power is derived from our character. How much is it a question shaped by our character, or our desire to change and be new and maybe better people? We often cannot reject temptations. It is a real struggle. To whom do we turn for help? We need support from family and friends. Most of all we need God's support. All of these contribute to will-power.

He who is dishonest in a little will also be dishonest in much. [see Luke 16:10] This is another commentary on submitting to temptation. Even if our dark secrets do not get out, they help shape our internal character. If we are dishonest about small things in secret for which we do not get caught, we may try and get away something much larger and hope for the same outcome. 'If we don't get caught, it's o.k.'

Dishonesty with ourselves is a major character flaw. Being dishonest in small, seemingly minor things suggests something about our character, something that will likely lead us to bigger sins than stealing a candy bar or sharing some minor confidence given to us with others. (I think they call that gossip.)

When you are alone you can only be dishonest with yourself. Lie to yourself. You can't lie to God and get away with it, because God sees the truth. God sees in our hearts and knows what is there. God will judge the character we have fashioned for ourselves. But God also forgives.

Maybe when you are alone you are strong enough to resist temptation. Maybe you can keep yourself honest. Jesus was tempted several times and yet he did not waver. He did not give in. God knows what it is like to feel tempted. Our God knows what it is like to be human.

What are the temptations he faced?

" Hunger and thirst

" Power and success

" Ditch God or put God to an unnecessary test.

Mark did not list them in his Gospel, but we all know them all too well -in public and in private.

Just as Jesus was not alone, and we are not alone. The text says angels ministered to him. Are they not ministering to us in those wild places, helping us to make the right choices?

"Deliver us from the evil one. Lead us not into temptation. Do not bring us to the test." So go the words of the Lord's Prayer in various translations. Jesus gave us this prayer to help us in the struggle with temptation and evil. It is a prayer to be recited daily, if not several times a day. We are not alone in this struggle. Temptation is around every corner of life. It is a part of the experience of what it means to be human.

I don't want to sound like a fire and brimstone preacher here, but the problem with temptation is that it leads us to sin. Sin is insidious, like the cancer causing particle you breath in; so innocuous, but twenty years later you have lung cancer. Sin seems on first blush, a minor annoyance, a small diversion, but it is a cancer causing particle that adds up to a deadly life-choking disease, leaving us as empty shells, dead to this world, and sometimes literally dead from succumbing to temptations in the case of some of those temptations that have become addictions.

We are not without hope as we face temptation. We are not without help when we wander off into the wild wilderness. God is walking beside us. I keep referring to two witnesses, two people always present when we face temptation: One is yourself and your conscience, and the other is God. Resolve to see temptation as challenging your basic character. And ask God to help strengthen you and deliver you from the temptations which may assault and hurt your soul.

AMEN