

Paul Gauche
Nugget for March 12-13, 2011

Series Theme: *Lead Us Not Into Temptation ...*

The season of Lent is time of repentance, self-examination, and confession. This is a time for us to consider how cultural forces press on us and “tempt” us to place our loyalties and passions where they don’t belong. We will walk this journey through Lent with a cross of ashes on our forehead toward the bright light of Easter morning. Along the way we will stop and ponder the temptations of Jesus, a man named Nicodemus, a woman at a well, a man born blind, and a dead man named Lazarus brought back to life.

Weekly Theme: *Avoiding the Unavoidable*

Scripture Text(s): **Genesis 2:5-17; 3:1-7 ... Matthew 4:1-11**

Genesis 2:4a-17; 3:1-7 ... Temptation in the Garden

2.4a In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, 5 when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; 6 but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— 7 then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. 8 And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. 9 Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

10 A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. 11 The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; 12 and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. 13 The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. 14 The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”

The First Sin and Its Punishment

3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” 2 The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; 3 but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” 4 But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; 5 for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were

opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

NOTES ON GENESIS

If Genesis 1 is the entire creation story through a telescope, then chapter 2 is the sixth day of creation through a microscope. There's a lot of detail here about what happened on that sixth day. We know from chapter 1 that God calls humankind into being in the image of God, blesses humankind and entrusts the care of the creation to what God has made.

In chapter 2 we learn how God does this: God forms humankind from the dust of the ground. Then in an intimate moment of detail we see God breathing the breath of life into the nostrils of this man he has created. It is only by this intimacy between the Creator and the created that humankind becomes "a living being."

What follows in verses 8 through 17 is a detailed description of the Garden with particular references to the trees which are pleasant to look at as well as eat from along with the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This tree is further described in chapter 3. Verses 10-14 details a river which forks into four branches and verses 15-17 detail the responsibilities given to humankind by God to care for the creation. In this sense, humankind becomes God's ambassadors caring for the creation in God's stead.

This picture of order is a set-up to what is coming. The beauty of the created order will stand in stark contrast to the disorder—even chaos that is coming next. God's Dream is threatened with temptation. It seems just a bit ironic to me that this is the very first question recorded in scripture. When humankind is finally moved to question, it is to question the very integrity of the creator of the universe. "Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?"

In Genesis 3:1-5 the Serpent introduces doubt and causes Eve to question God's very word." This, of course, leads to the breakdown of communication and trust between Adam and Eve—a whole lot of blaming going on, and then the breakdown of communication and trust between God and humankind. Eve and Adam both twist the details of God's direction to suit themselves. God has told them that they may eat freely of every tree in the garden; but of the tree if the knowledge of good and evil they shall not eat. Later, as Eve—in the midst of the encounter with the serpent, tries to recall what God said she asserts: "...God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'"

The rest is downhill from there. Temptation seems to derail the whole narrative as mistrust, convulsion, lies and deception prevail. There is a note of redemption in this in verse 9 where God, trying to locate the man he loves gives Adam the opportunity to both confess and disclose: "Where are you?" Adam confesses his sin with the appropriate repercussions following.

God's question to Adam, "Where are you?" is a good one that echoes through the Millennia right up to today. In the face of temptation, God asks us: Where are you? Well, we might answer, 'In the middle of it; we're always right in the middle of temptation! But what can we do about it? The narrative from Matthew 4 seems to get at that very question.

Matthew 4:1-11... Temptation in the Wilderness

The Temptation of Jesus (Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13)

4 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 he answered, “It is written,

‘One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

‘He will command his angels concerning you,’
and ‘On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’ ”

⁷ Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ”

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹ and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

‘Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.’ ”

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

NOTES ON MATTHEW

The passage in Matthew 4 follows directly after Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan by John. A baptismal blessing is conferred on Jesus as he comes up from the water. The text seems to indicate Jesus is the only one who actually sees the heavens opened. The text says, suddenly the heavens were opened to him. Contrast this with The Voice that speaks the words: “This is my son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased” which seems to be directed to those standing in proximity to the baptism. Whatever the case, Jesus takes not only the image of the heavens opening to him but also the Voice of God speaking blessing upon him with him as he turns toward the wilderness and what comes with it.

Chapter 4 opens with Jesus begin led by the Spirit into the Wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. This same Spirit that filled him in the waters of baptism now go with him. It’s important to note that the Spirit does not *maliciously* lead him into this vast wasteland of sand and temptation. But the Spirit goes with him into whatever awaits him wherever he goes. The disciplines of fasting, prayer, and solitude among all of the other disciplines that Jesus must have practiced at this point will carry him into and through the following forty days.

Specifically, what follows here are three temptations of the devil (*diabolos*) also known as Satan, the Evil One, The Father of Lies, Adversary, Accuser, Slanderer, False Accuser just to name a few which really betray his character. The three temptations are all leveled at vulnerable points in all of humankind: physical needs, personal acclaim, power and prestige.

The First Temptation: turn stones into bread ... 4:3-4

Satan comes to Jesus and tries to cast the same doubt that was cast back in the book of Genesis—at the beginning of all things. “If... you are the Son of God...” This is a phrase that we see in all three temptations, although in the third one it’s simply inferred. This is Satan’s way of manipulating Jesus. But Jesus has already been identified by the Voice from Heaven that he is

the Son of God, so Satan is not doubting it and he isn't trying to get Jesus to doubt it. Satan is trying to get Jesus to use his own power to get something for which he already trusts God. Jesus will call on scripture to point to what he already knows in his heart: 'One doesn't live by bread alone, but from every word that flows from God's mouth.'

The Second Temptation: Throw yourself down from the pinnacle ... 4:5-7

I suppose it's just when Jesus begins to feel a bit alone, lonely, possibly abandoned, Satan takes him to Jerusalem—the Holy City and places him on the pinnacle of the temple, and says to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" The quote is from Psalm 92:11-12. But Satan is here twisting scripture and trying to get Jesus to test God in a couple of ways: first, putting God to the test and second, manipulating people into belief based on miraculous displays of power. We find out that as Jesus' ministry unfolds, even raising Lazarus from the dead didn't satisfy the people's curiosity about him. Jesus once again takes Satan back to scripture and reminds him that God cannot be put to the test.

The Third Temptation: Worship Satan and attain worldly power and prestige ... 4:8-10

Satan takes Jesus to the highest mountain and shows him all of the kingdoms of the world and their splendor and says, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." It is an empty promise from Satan because while he does have influence in the world, the real power and authority is found in God. As one commentator suggests: "Before he [Jesus] sits on his royal throne, (above all the nations of the world) he must hang on the cross." (Michael Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary, Matthew*, page 160). So Satan suggests this shortcut to glory by worshipping Satan, but Jesus will not be taken off his mission. The point here is to know the difference between truth and the lies. To counter that, Jesus once again turns to scripture: "It is written ... Worship the Lord and him only shall you worship."

Jesus said to Satan, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Satan wanted Jesus to compromise, to give in to the immediate desires that so often rule people. Jesus could have, but he didn't. With each temptation, Jesus went back to the Word of God, "It is written!"

When the temptation was finally over with, angels suddenly appear and wait on him.

The Season of Lent is a time when we take a look at those things in our lives which distract us and tempt us to take our eyes off the Savior who finally in the end blazed the trail to the cross and beyond for us.