

Imagine that you are at a surprise party being held for your child, or your best friend. People have come from everywhere. You don't know most of them. You wonder who all these people could be. After the party has been going on for a while, things get interesting. A celebrity shows up, goes over to your friend, or child, takes the microphone and says,

"You are God's son, the beloved, with you God is well pleased." And then walks away with no further explanation.

The room goes quiet. After a few moments of awkward silence, people start wondering what just happened, and conversations start up again. When the party is about to wind down, this same celebrity offers to take your friend or child on tour with her. Together, they get into her very shiny and expensive car, and drive off. What you don't know is that she drops him off in the middle of the desert and says she'll be back in forty days to pick him up.

This is what the Holy Spirit did for Jesus according to the story in Luke: Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, ²²and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, [where he was baptized] and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where 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.

1. Devil: "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread."

Jesus: "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

What is being tested? Doubting self: Jesus! Prove to yourself that you're really the Son of God. You're hungry, you can fix that by your own power, you don't need God.

2. Devil: If you, then, will worship me, [all the kingdoms of the world] will all be yours."

Jesus: "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" *What is being tested? Doubting God: Jesus! You can manipulate things and get your way with political power.*

3. Devil: "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' ¹¹and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

What is being tested? Doubting God's love: Jesus! God has left you all alone out here. He's really not going to protect you. Try it, you'll see. God is not faithful. God does not really love you or he would not let you be tested out here all alone.

We too, are being led on tour and being dropped off in the desert for forty days, (not including Sundays). It is our Lenten tour, and our celebrity is the Holy Spirit.

We can't do it alone, and neither did Jesus: He had the help of God's Word, prayer, and the Holy Spirit, and so do we.

"The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" Romans

What are the places of testing or temptation for us? What are we being asked to try on, try out, decide about? Is it...

1. *That we don't need forgiveness: We are not sinful. We don't need to say I'm sorry. We can get it right all the time on our own and we don't need God's help to do it better. All we need to do is ignore the stuff we aren't proud of and try harder next time.* OR, are we all sinners being invited to lean on God's love rather than on our own strength?
2. *That we are beyond forgiveness: We are so unworthy, that even God could not forgive us. We cannot forgive ourselves. We soldier on, but underneath, we are afraid that our unworthiness will be discovered. Perhaps we suffer from low self-esteem. Or, perhaps we over-compensate with a tough exterior.* OR, are we all loved, even those of us who feel

unworthy? Are we being invited to discover how deeply we are loved, even in the places we hide and are ashamed of?

3. *Gossiping about each other.* Each of us is a precious child of God. A wise teacher of mine said that it is always better to talk *to* each other than *about* each other, especially in the church. She also said, that whenever we are tempted to tell stories about each other to remember that we're next. "Let each person be the teller of his or her own story," she said.
4. *Fear that we are stuck with whatever place we are in.* BUT, Our God is a God of new life and new possibilities. God has brought us here to bring us further into the life of the Kingdom of God.

What is on offer this Lent?

God can enter and make all things new. God's Holy Spirit can speak just the right word into our heart so that we can begin again in a new way. God can do whatever we allow, whatever we don't say "no" to.

Jesus had time in the desert to get to know himself in relationship to God. With less distractions, he had time to decide what was important about how he made his choices. We can do some of this sifting in Lent, too. What's important to us? How is God inviting me into fullness of life right now?

We can read and meditate on the Bible, choosing to spend a few minutes a day.

We can ask the Holy Spirit for help in prayer.

We can be attentive to the needs of others.

We can replace our addictive distractions with something creative.

We can find time for silence

We can make a practice of giving thanks for at least one person and one thing every day.

We can sign up for a Lenten study group.

We can ask God to make this Lent a Holy time where we show up to be transformed by God's love. Every day, at any moment, in the measure we allow ourselves by God's grace.