

Lent is the season of spiritual spring cleaning; for 40 days we have the opportunity reflect on the things that have a hold on us and to discover the grace that sets us free.

This Lent, the four pastors of Mount Penn – Rev. Deb Derby at Trinity UCC, Rev. Diane LaFauci at Faith Lutheran, Rev. Michael Reist at Bethany Lutheran, and I will be preaching on the same texts; our over-arching theme is commitment – what commitment did Jesus demonstrate in his temptation in the wilderness? What commitment did Jesus ask of the disciples? Where did it lead? Then, at our Wednesday night services, 7:30 PM this week at Faith Lutheran, (let’s have a better showing than the 2 who showed up at Trinity UCC Wednesday night) we will focus on the grace that sustained Jesus and the disciples in their commitment.

Jesus, “the pioneer of our salvation,” leads the way in his encounter with the Devil. Jesus has been fasting, so he’s hungry. He’s also focused. That is the fruit of fasting; we discover how attached we are to bread, and more deeply, to satisfying our appetites; we discover the power of two little words, “I want.” If we yield to “I want,” its demonic hold on us grows. If instead, we seek God’s grace to resist, to say, “Away with you, Satan,” we put our wants in their proper place; we detach from “I want” and attach ourselves to God. We commit ourselves as Jesus did to ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’<sup>1</sup>

Have you ever day-dreamed about winning the lottery? I have. I thought about the endowments I would create; the good I would do... and the Cadillac. Then I wondered, why do I have these day dreams? What lies beneath?

If I won the lottery, I would be free from want. No fear. No anxiety. I would be free, and it occurred to me, that I can be free right now. If each of you gave.... No, I can be free from “I want” right now. Instead of yielding to this little temptation or that little temptation and increasing the hold “I want” has on me, I can say, “Away with you, Satan.” I can choose to trust God in this moment with this little thing and step out of “I want’s” darkness and into God’s light. I can be free, right here, right now. “Away with you, Satan.”

“Away with you, Satan,” sounds like something from a cheesy horror flick; it sounds like an over-reaction. We’re giving up chocolate for Lent; someone offers us a Snickers bar, and we reply, “Away with you, Satan!” ???

Notice that Jesus didn’t say that when the Devil tempted him to turn stones into bread (spoiler alert – isn’t that kind of what he did with the loaves and fishes?); he didn’t say that when the Devil tempted him to hurl himself off the Temple (second spoiler alert – isn’t that

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<sup>1</sup>*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Mt 4:10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

kind of what Jesus did when he hurled himself into the Abyss on the cross, “Into your hands, I commit my spirit?”).

Jesus only said, “Away with you, Satan,” when they finally got to the heart of the matter. The Devil didn’t care that Jesus was hungry; nor did he care about Jesus’ need to be noticed. The Devil wanted to duplicate the success he had with the first Adam with the second Adam; he wanted to lure Jesus into treating God as less than God.

That is the great temptation; that is the line we dare not cross; that is the question that lurks in the shadows of our souls when we confront, “I want.” Will we treat God as less than God? Will we put serving ourselves first and serving God second?

“It’s only a little bread, pastor, what’s the big deal?” “It’s only a little more time for me. I’ll say my prayers tomorrow.”

“Away with you, Satan!” Away with half-hearted commitment! Away with treating God as less than God! Away with the countless compromises we make that undermine our devotion to Jesus Christ! Away with living in the shadows when God invites us to walk in the light.

Lent is the season of spiritual spring cleaning; it’s our opportunity to tune up our souls. Consider your compromises; where do you cut corners in your spiritual practice? Do you pray daily, every so-often, when you’re desperate? How often do you read the Bible? The Devil knows his Bible. How about you? ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”<sup>2</sup> What words are you living by?

This isn’t legalism; it’s taking care of our souls. If we don’t change the oil in our cars, sooner or later, we’ll pay a price. In the same way, if we don’t take care of our souls, we’ll pay a price. We’ll live in the shadows of our souls where there is anxiety, uncertainty, fear, and shame.

Jesus came to deliver us from the shadow. He came to help us find our way by showing us the way. He committed himself to putting God first and trusted that all these things would be added as well. God would give daily bread. God would deliver him from evil.

Consider your compromises. Pick one and say, “Away with you, Satan!” Commit yourself anew to following Jesus Christ in that area of your life. Discover the hold it has on you, the power it has over you, and rejoice as God’s grace sets you free!. Rejoice! Light shines in your darkness when you say, “Away with you, Satan!” Amen.

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<sup>2</sup>*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Mt 4:4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.