

## **Homily – Humble Before God**

**Jason Manville**

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Good Morning.

Rob asked me if I would preach about a month after he got here and I put him off. My excuse – I didn't want to preach while I was Warden. Well as my term was winding down and we were fine tuning the annual budget in November, he asked me again if I would be willing to preach sometime in February. Since I had already put this off once, I felt that I should keep my word. So I broke out my phone pulled up the lectionary page and started browsing through the readings for this month. I came across the gospel from today about Jesus temptation in the wilderness and I figured that it would not be too difficult to fashion a sermon about temptation and put today on the calendar.

So here we are. And let me tell you this was not easy. My faith like many other parts of my life goes in waves. There are times of feeling God's presence in almost every aspect of my life, from how I function a work, to my relationship with my beautiful wife and children.

But then there are other times when I struggle, I question God's plan for me, I don't feel God's presence in hardly any aspects of my life. And this is where I sat and wrestled in a place of darkness as I started writing a sermon for the first time in my life.

It's funny how hindsight works. As I struggled to figure out what I had offer about today's readings I kept thinking: What if I had just said no? Or put Rob's request off again? Or just picked a different Sunday?

Then I would not have had to engage with what has been set before us today. As we enter the first Sunday in Lent, we read Luke's account of Jesus temptation in the wilderness. My initial thought in choosing today revolved around the idea of temptation. But during this process it expanded into so much more.

According to the Book of Common Prayer, all Christians are invited "to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word. This 40 days of Lent leading up to Easter are clearly modeled after the 40 days that Christ spent in the wilderness.

So what does this mean for us? Are we supposed to give something up? Are we supposed to turn away from temptation? Are we supposed to fast? Yes. Yes. And Yes. But Why? And maybe more importantly HOW?

Well, being that we are liturgical church. I think that is only right to take a look at where we have been. Last week I was teaching in the Youth Forum as we were reflecting on the theme of Epiphany. We began Epiphany with service of Lights. (if you did not attend I highly recommend you try to come next year.) The first Sunday of Epiphany we read the description of the baptism of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke and see the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove.

The Final Sunday in Epiphany we were looking at the transfiguration of Jesus in Luke's Gospel where we hear that while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.

We discussed the similarities to the Old Testament reading from Exodus As Moses came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, he did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. So in these reading, we see a direct connection between an interaction with God and the visible manifestation of change. This seems to be a theme that bookends the readings from Epiphany. CHANGE.

As Rob discussed last week in his sermon change can come in a variety of times and in varying ways. Change is the foundational element that should encompass this season of self reflection and repentance, prayer and fasting that we call Lent. So the answer to the WHY do we do these things is Lent is so that we become closer to God and change.

But the change that that I am talking about does not just happen. If you decide you want to "be a better Christian" does just deciding to it make it so. For me the answer is a resounding NO. So HOW do we do it?

Let me give you an example. I have decided that I want to make myself physically stronger. Now I could wake up every morning a reaffirm that I want to be stronger, but will that make it so? Will that illicit change? Not very likely.

Or I could go the gym and put 300# on a barbell and try to squat it, press it overhead and pull it. Will that make me stronger? Will that illicit change? I would most likely be gravely injured rather than get stronger.

So how am I going to do this? I did some research. I read about different theories regarding building strength, and I found a program that I have decided to follow to reach my goal.

The program starts with light weights with an emphasis on using correct form. I work out 3 days a week, alternating through a series of 5 barbell lifts that engage several muscle groups.

The program is centered on something called “progressive resistance”, which means very time I work out I lift heavier and heavier weights than the time before, working in small increments so that over time and repetition my entire body becomes stronger.

So is this going to make me stronger than the previous 2 examples? It should. Through the discipline of doing this three days a week, from the physical act of lifting heavier and heavier weights. I should get stronger through progressive resistance.

So what does this have to do with today’s gospel?

Well if we want to manifest change within ourselves during this season of Lent. We probably need to start thinking about engaging in the act.

Just as I looked to an example of building strength from someone who understands it much better than I do, can we look to the Gospel for best example of how to change spiritually?

In today’s gospel, we hear of Jesus being led by the Spirit into the wilderness where he was tempted and fasted.

This idea of fasting is an ancient spiritual discipline, one that we assert that we should be doing during this season of change. But I think that many of us get fasting wrong.

We often decide to take something out of our life that probably shouldn’t be there in the first place. I am giving up eating Girls scout cookies, or smoking cigarettes. Or we have a bad taste left in our mouth about something ingrained in us from our youth about fasting before receiving communion or not eating meat during Lent. But is fasting for fasting sake eliciting a spiritual change.

I would suggest that the answer is NO. But if we take a closer look at the gospel might we learn something else.

As I mentioned early when originally choosing this gospel, my thought was that this is about temptation. But the more I read it, the more it seemed to me that instead of focusing on what was being done by the devil, the tempting, I should be focusing on what Jesus is doing.

We hear the devil tempt with food, and Jesus responds, "One does not live by bread alone." We hear the devil tempt with glory and all authority if he worships him, and Jesus responds, "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only" and we hear the devil tempt with testing God's allegiance to Jesus, the which Jesus responds "Do not put you Lord God to the test."

I would like to suggest the things that are being used to tempt Jesus are things that he has access too. These are things that Jesus can already do for himself. We see Jesus in later gospel stories supplying the masses with abundance from scarcity. We proclaim that all the honor and glory goes to Him as we say the Our Father. And we know, as Jesus must have known, that God's allegiance need not be tested. Jesus is being tempted by things that he already has.

So what Jesus is exhibiting here is not rejecting or overcoming the temptation, but rather something else.

I would suggest that Jesus is exemplifying humility before God, by consciously not putting himself first -- rising above his need for food, asserting that only God should be worshipped and served and affirming that God should not be tested. Jesus is showing us the meaning behind the his actions in the wilderness. He is not just going through the motions.

Now if Jesus is our example, and we can model this conscious act of being humble before God as the reason behind our actions for the change we want to occur How much stronger can we become spiritually?

Rather than fasting for fasting sake, if we focus on humbly practicing self denial for God, does it change the outcome of the act. If when we pray, and we make it not about us, but about what we can do to humbly serve God, will this change us? When we engage in self-reflection can we let go of our pride and humble ourselves before God so that true repentance can occur? So that real change can happen.

So rather than going through the motions of Lent, Let us consciously add the progressive resistance of the intention of humble submission to God in all that we undertake. And Let's see how much stronger can we get?

And so this week as go about our lives, I challenge each of us to look to Jesus' example and practice adding humility before God as the intention behind our actions, make it the weight that we are moving and lets see how much stronger we can get. How much we can truly change. AMEN.