

"Be God's."

Matthew 4 : 1-11

Our culture is loaded with all kinds of temptations.

The famous actress Mae West was once asked what she did whenever she had to choose between two evils; her reply was that she picked the one evil she hadn't tried yet.

A salesman had finally got his chance to make the Really Big Sale. He was going into the final interview on the biggest contract he had ever written. As he was ushered into the office of the executive buyer, an assistant brought her coffee and left. The atmosphere was cordial, and he knew he was giving his best presentation ever.

Then the assistant tapped on the door, re-entered the office and spoke briefly with the executive. She stood and said, "I apologize, but I have to tend to a matter. I'll just be a minute or two." And she followed her assistant out of the room.

The salesman looked around the beautifully appointed office. He saw her family pictures on her desk. Then he noticed a contract on her desk. She had evidently been studying a bid from a competitor. Leaning forward, he could see the column of figures, but it was obscured by a diet soda can.

He was tempted to move the can and see the bottom line of his competitor's bid. What harm possibly could there be in reading her private information? After all, she had left it out in plain sight, almost. After wrestling with himself a while, he finally decided to take a peek.

As he lifted the soda can, he discovered that the can wasn't filled with soda at all. Instead it was a bottomless can filled with 1,000 BBs which gushed out, and ran all over the desk and cascaded onto the carpet. His attempt to short cut the competition was exposed.

Not every temptation is so obvious. Not every failure is so embarrassing. But every temptation is a challenge.

Our culture is packed with options that are both possibilities and pitfalls.

Here is my candidate for the #1 temptation we indulge in most regularly: The temptation to gloat and glory over the failings of other people.

Our indulgence in this temptation keeps a swarm of paparazzi recording Britney Spears' every move. One can't turn on the news these days without being shown images of her taken by ambulance to the hospital. Britney Spears is a train wreck, waiting to happen. She hasn't even hit rock bottom, yet. And how we the public, seem to almost get a kick out of watching her reckless lifestyle.

Our indulgence in this temptation splashes the mug shots of celebrity drunk drivers across TV screens as though they were real news.

Our indulgence in this temptation brings us lurid "true crime" shows, Court-TV, and certain reality shows— as though watching others sin somehow absolves us of our own.

The season of Lent is supposed to be a time of serious spiritual searching and renewal. It is a time for self-scrutiny and re-dedication to a life of service and, if need be, suffering in the cause of the kingdom. It is a time of preparation for the passion of Christ.

How then has it become a time to give up chocolate, or hamburgers, or video games?

What have we done?

I remember when I was in seminary, I had a couple of classmates who each had a drinking problem. These were two men studying for the ministry, but they frequently drank themselves to a high level of intoxication and sometimes came to class the next day with a hangover.

I also recall that throughout the three years of seminary, each Lenten season these two men made a big show out of telling the rest of us what they were "giving up" for Lent...and it wasn't alcohol, either. I can't even remember what it was that they professed to "give up" during the Lenten season. But, they seemed proud of their piety and they went around asking the rest of us what we were giving up for Lent as well.

Today both of these men are ordained pastors serving somewhere in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The problem with all of this is that they were missing the point of Lent. Lent isn't about what we give up. Rather, Lent is about who we choose to be.

The temptation or “tests” that the devil flung at Jesus after his forty-day-fast in the wilderness weren’t just challenges to DO something he wasn’t supposed to do. They were challenges tempting Jesus to BE someone he was not born to be.

Did you catch that?

The ultimate temptations in life are NOT those that push you to “**do**” things you aren’t supposed to “do,” but to “**be**” a person who you weren’t made to be.

The devil wasn’t tempting Jesus to take the edge off his hunger by turning stones into bread. He was tempting the “Son of God” to replace his table relationship to God with fast food.

The devil wasn’t tempting Jesus to jump off the temple roof. He was tempting the Son of God to demand God take action based on the Son’s desires and preferences.

The devil wasn’t tempting Jesus with the power and prestige offered by the kingdoms of the world. He was tempting the Son of God to intentionally orphan himself from the Father.

Have you ever considered how stacked the deck was against the devil succeeding in his temptations?

For forty days and forty nights Jesus had been alone with “the Spirit” who had led him there.

For forty days and forty nights he had been away from needy crowds, mundane concerns and tiresome commitments.

For forty days and forty nights he had been in communion with his Father in ways we cannot imagine.

After forty days and forty nights Jesus may have been “famished,” but his spirit was strong. After forty days and nights Jesus was more truly himself than he had ever been before.

The devil fails miserably not because Jesus refuses to do the things offered. The devil fails miserably because Jesus will be no one other than His own true self, the Son of God.

The temptation to be less than you are, to be less than what God has made you to be, to be other than you were born to be, is the Great Temptation that underlies all other temptations in life.

Jesus' life, death and Resurrection offer us a new covenant relationship with God. Because Jesus took His identity all the way to the cross, we have the gift of a new life in Christ.

God has called us to be God's beloved, to be God's sons and daughters — redeemed, re-dreamed, re-created, re-born.

God calls us to be this true self — to be the Body of Christ on earth, to allow Christ to live His Resurrection life and through us, making us more the original, one-of-a-kind person God created us to be.

During this season of Lent, instead of “giving up” some indulgence, some temptation to “do” something (eat, drink, party) . . . What if we were to “take on” something?

What if we were personally to “take on” the identity of Christ?

What if we were corporately to “take on” the identity of a Christ community?

What if we were to resolve that every person we would encounter this Lent we would find some way to bless them, with some word of encouragement?

What if we were to forgive rather than to condemn?

What if we were to love rather than to hate?

I would suggest that we use this Lenten season as an opportunity to try to be the people whom God created us to be. People who are like God Himself.

Rich Mullins has been called “the poet laureate of the contemporary Christian music world.” He is the composer of the well-known contemporary Christian single *Awesome God*.

Whenever his fans would ask him to autograph a picture or CD, he simply wrote these words: “Be God's, Rich.”

Rich Mullins is no longer with us. He was killed in a car accident on a stormy night back in 1997. But his message to the world is still around, signed with sharpie ink on various pictures and CD's: “Be God's, Rich.”

This Lent, instead of “giving up” chocolate, let’s “take on” a mission. And the ultimate mission in life? The mission that Jesus fulfilled in the Scripture text for this morning:

“Be God’s.” AMEN.