

Lent 1C, St. David's Episcopal Church, Luke 4:1-13 (*Elizabeth Felicetti*)

“After his baptism, Jesus full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.” This story always starts off the first Sunday in Lent because it's what the season of Lent is based on: forty days of purifying ourselves, like our Lord's forty days in the wilderness.

When we set out to grow spiritually, the devil is going to show up. We don't talk a lot about the devil in the Episcopal church, so you might feel uncomfortable. I'm not talking about a guy with a tail and a pitchfork, but evil exists in the world. The invasion of Ukraine is evil, for example. The devil is a way to personify evil.

I prefer the more ancient idea of Satan, which in Hebrew means adversary, one who opposes. Jesus set out to fast, so Satan tempted him to create a delicious loaf of bread to quell his hunger. Jesus resisted, so Satan then tempted him with power and with testing God.

Does tempting always look so dramatic? We just ended the season of Epiphany, where we heard lots of stories about call: the call of Jeremiah. The call of Isaiah. The call of Jesus' first disciples. Tempting can be a pull away from our call. Jesus was called to be the light of the world, and if he had succumbed to temptations of celebrity and power he would not have been true to his calling. But again, that is dramatic. Temptation can be something smaller, more ordinary.

I felt called to become the rector here more than eleven years ago, and I still struggle to discern what that means, and a couple of examples seem to me to relate to temptation. One was at the end of my mother Jan's life. I had just been to see her, and had spent two Sundays away from church. She fell the day I flew back here and broke several things and had to go on hospice. I was going back again in two weeks and was confident that she would still be alive then. At least, until that Saturday night, when my stepbrother called to say that she had taken a bad turn.

So it was a decision point for me. It felt irresponsible to take a flight out the next day at 6 AM and leave the church hanging, so instead I arranged to fly out Monday morning at 6 AM. She'll wait for me, I thought. My father had waited for me the year before, not dying until two days after Easter so I could be there without affecting Holy Week and Easter for the congregation. Surely she would wait for me as well.

She died two hours before my plane landed.

I thought I was being tempted to neglect my responsibilities, but now I think I was tempted to think too much of myself, to think that the church just couldn't function one more Sunday without me. I made the wrong choice that time. I regret it. I can't change it.

But I learned from it. A little over a year later, I planned another trip to Phoenix. My niece Jenny was having her first baby. I feel a special connection with Jenny, who was born when I was in high school, and I got to meet her and hold her the day she was born. I hoped that I would be there when she had her first baby, but it wasn't likely.

I was scheduled to fly home, here, on January 2, and the baby was due a few days later. The fourth or fifth, I think. It was important for me to make my January second flight, because we

had a Ukecharist scheduled with St. Michael's on Epiphany, January 6, and we would have our *only* rehearsal for it on the third. Do you remember our Uke-charists? Uke as in ukulele. We would get a bunch of ukulele players and have a service around that music. Those fun services were a lot of work to create. My friend Jeunée, the rector of St. Michael's, and I both needed to be at that rehearsal. When we planned the service we picked one date that would definitely work for both of us. We had never done a Ukecharist with only one rehearsal, so this was mandatory.

Back in Arizona at the end of December, Jenny's husband came down with the flu, so pregnant Jenny had to move in with her mom for a bit to avoid contracting the flu. I was staying at her mom's too. And on the morning of the second, the morning of my flight, the day before that mandatory rehearsal, Jenny was having contractions and had to be taken to the hospital. And I had to make a decision: be responsible and make that rehearsal, or be present for the birth of my great niece, Alice.

I picked Alice. I let Jeunée down. And I have never regretted that for one second. Alice's birthday was one of the best days of my life. A piece of my soul was freed that day, and that choice helped ease the regret of making the wrong choice about my mom.

Ordinary stuff: a birth, a death. But not ordinary to me. I see those experiences and choices before me as temptations. I was tempted to think that my role as rector was so important that Sunday services and ukulele services would not happen without my presence. While I missed the mandatory rehearsal I made the actual Ukecharist and it was wonderful. Jeunée was fine without me, and she understood my choice. She understood my resisting the temptation to believe that it just wouldn't happen without me.

I remember my very first day here. Ron Gotshall, then on the vestry, was waxing the floor in the parish hall. There was a banner over the door that welcomed me, and the outdoor sign welcomed me, and I felt pretty important as I walked through the glass doors as the rector of this parish for the first time. I'd met Ron, and liked him, and stuck my head in the parish hall to say hi. I think I kind of thought he would throw me a one-man parade or something. He did look up and was pleasant, but when I asked how he was doing, he said, "It's just another day."

And I realized, yes, it is. I had been tempted to think I was coming to save this church, but really, I was coming to work here, to work among the people of St. David's to discern where God was calling us and how we could get there together. It was just another day: another *good* day. I love it here. I am called here. Serving here is my passion.

And the work here goes on whether or not I am present. I'm not any kind of savior. This does *not* mean that I am unimportant, or that any of you are unimportant. But our mission is important enough, and we all need to be engaged enough, that we can sometimes carry on when other beloved members have to attend to a major event in their person lives that is not a part of church.

Perhaps it seems self-indulgent that I've talked about myself and things that happened to me years ago in this sermon in a time when world events like the invasion of Ukraine dominate the news. But, focusing all of our attention on evil like that on display with that invasion can take our attention away from the temptations in our own lives.

Turning a stone into bread and becoming king of the world and flinging yourself off a rock might seem like temptations that aren't relevant to us, but we are surrounded at temptations. The devil is going to show up during Lent. Who are you and what are you called by God to do? What is getting in the way of that? What temptations are ahead?