

“Temp Work”

Sermon on Sunday, March 6, 2022

Dear church,

Temp work is the theme for this Sunday. It doesn't have the best of reputations out on the job market. I have yet to meet a single person who wants a Temp job rather than a permanent one with benefits. The agencies that supply those jobs usually don't give workers the same level of pay and security as most permanent forms of employment.

This morning we are talking about a different type of Temp work, namely Temptation work. It's not a temporary gig at all but a permanent feature of human life. We frequently experience temptations, whether it's the small ones in the form of food we like so much, knowing that it isn't good for us, or the big ones when it comes to betrayal, power, deception or addiction. The worst temptations are those we don't even notice, and I believe that's the main reason why the story of Jesus' temptation is dramatized in the versions of Matthew and Luke - to lift temptation out of the shadows, to make it more visible. We get a concentrated dose of temptation here. It's a heavyweight fight, and with some embellishment you could easily see it performed on stage as a drama in three acts, Jesus going toe to toe with the devil.

In our life? It's usually far less dramatic. Do we even notice temptations? It's usually a slippery slope, innocent and deceptive in the beginning, but as we get into it, increasingly demanding and destructive. We could all ask ourselves: "what is my biggest temptation?" And after some pondering we might come up with the classic material of the Catholic Confessional Booth: being mean to someone; using foul language; not being 100% truthful on the tax return; drinking too much... Most priests must fall asleep in the Confession Booth because people are not sharing what really keeps them separated from God and from the image of God at the core of their being.

I am convinced that our biggest temptations are usually ones we aren't even aware of. And I suspect we can only get to those by engaging in deeper probing meditation and

contemplation practices in the wilderness of our souls. Who am I when nobody else looks, when nobody else is around? What are the little lies I tell myself about myself? And so we begin this journey of Lent as a discovery tour into the unknown parts of our hearts and souls. That sounds awfully scary on a bright Sunday morning in front of a lot of good people. But remember, Jesus himself did it. That's why he was led into the wilderness.

Like Jesus, we don't begin this journey into the wilderness of Lent empty or in need of God's assurance and presence. We have been given plenty of affirmation and support upfront. Whenever we engage in serious self-examination, we already know that we are loved beyond measure. If warts and pimples come up on the inside of our being – and they just might - we know that they can be removed. Luke tells us that Jesus went into the wilderness **FULL** of the Holy Spirit, the words from his Baptism still echoing in his heart, "You are my son whom I love." That's the way to do soul work. If you already know that you are redeemed and loved beyond measure, it's easier to face your hidden temptations.

But then the false promises come into play. In this story the devil poses as a fulfiller of everything humans dream of: power, magic, unlimited possibilities... "He showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to..." False! As false as Russian state news! It's a blatant lie. But false promises are the devil's bread and butter, always.

Let me shift for a moment from the individual implications of this story to the societal ones. Are we not a society of false promises, unrealistic expectations and unlimited temptations? Have we not arranged ourselves with the lies of progress and affluence promised to us as an easily obtainable and desirable goal of life here in the affluent west? The devil says: "If you are a real American you will own a mansion and several cars and will be taken care of in your old age." And many fall for it. The devil says, "If you are a person of real freedom, you don't need to wear masks during the height of a pandemic. I will protect you." The devil says, "If you have made it, enjoy your life in every which way

you can. Buy another car, a time share, whatever you want, it's all yours..." Do we notice those temptations?

And are we not paying a huge price for the incredible temptation of believing we are THE chosen affluent society on earth? And now the world catches up with our cars and rush to build and produce and pollute and we find, it's not sustainable at all. Our planet is in danger because we fell for a huge temptation. And didn't even notice it. Someone promised us we could have everything. It was false. As false as Russian state news. Man does not live from bread alone, Jesus taught. And we need to find a way back to God and the way to our sacred roots leads straight through the wilderness of lies and temptations, some of which are already at home and happy in our souls. Please take this journey of Lent seriously and take the prayer times seriously. It is a time to reset our inner lives and discover who we are. Take advantage of it. Make the most of it. You are loved beyond measure. **Amen.**