

Don't test God, trust in God!

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Luke 4:1-13

“From dust you have come, and to dust you shall return. Walk the road to Jerusalem with Jesus.” These were the words that were said at the Ash Wednesday service, as people came forward and were marked with the ashes in the sign of a cross. Ash Wednesday is the ritual that marks the start of the season of Lent. A season of inner testing that begins with Jesus in the wilderness. After being baptized in the River Jordan, Jesus committed himself to the mission God intended. During Epiphany, we all heard the call to follow Jesus, to learn from him. We heard the promise that life would never be the same if we were to follow. We will be transformed, and we will never be thirsty or hungry again.

What are we being asked to learn, and more importantly *commit* to in Lent? Our scriptures today are clear: we are being called to commit to trusting in God. God, according to the psalmist, is described as a refuge, a fortress. Something that provides us with protection and strength. Something that we can find shelter in, comfort, safety. We hear this when God says once the psalmist turns to third person. And it says, “When they call to me, I will answer them.” God says, “I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue them and honour them. With long life, I will sanctify them and show them my salvation.” The season of Lent invites us to embrace a new way of being. It reminds us that we have a calling. That we are called beyond our human needs and desires. We are being called to live with intention. To abide in God, abide in our faith, and we are being called to turn towards God. To respond to faith in trials and troubles and temptations and testing.

The reality is, we face temptation every single day. Some of us may be – I’m looking at those of you online – some of us may be tempted to stay in bed when it’s cold outside. Or stay in our homes where we can have coffee during worship. And I don’t blame you one bit. If I had the choice, I would be tempted to do that as well. Others of us may be tempted by just another cookie. It’s just sitting there – what’s one more cookie? Even though we know that we should not. These are temptations, or tests, that deal with our desires. But that was not what Jesus faced when he was in the wilderness. Jesus faced tests by the devil that could distract or turn Jesus away from God. Away from God’s mission, away from his call to live out God’s mission in the world. The devil tried to tempt Jesus into testing God. Now, with all of the conflicts that have arisen because of government regulations, it is tempting to cast judgment on others who do not hold our views or our values. With the conflict in Ukraine, it’s tempting to lose hope. When

faced with a leader who is driven by personal gain and little regard for people, it's tempting to doubt the words that we heard the psalmist say today. When God said, "When they call to me, I will answer them. I will be with them in trouble."

Kimberly Van Driel, a theologian, states that "the text from the gospel reading today tells a story about how evil works on the basis of distortions and lies. The devil presents wants as needs, falsehoods as truths, and distrust as faith."¹ Commercials are the easiest example of wants presented as needs, which I'm sure we have all fallen victim to at some point in our life. Maybe more when we were children, but maybe not. Politicians and leaders are often found to be presenting falsehoods as truth. They use the role of propaganda in wars to serve their purpose and their desires. But distrust as faith is something that's, I think, a little more challenging. Can we be people of faith and still have doubt? Is doubt the same as distrust? We heard in the temptation in the wilderness that Jesus trusts in God. And in the face of these tests and temptations, Jesus chooses to trust in God and commits to God's calling.

As I've said, Lent is a journey of intentionality. As the season of Lent begins, we are invited to trust in God. I personally remember the day that I saw this in the psalm and it hit me how important it was to trust in God, and how I realized in that moment that I probably hadn't trusted in God for quite some time. This was well into my youth ministry times, where I was really just doing the bare minimum of showing people that I had faith. Because I was afraid. Afraid because trusting in God meant that I was going to be called to do things that I wasn't comfortable with; called to do the right thing in the face of violence sometimes, in the face of judgment. It's a scary thing, but we say in one of our creeds that *We trust in God*. Every time we say that, I am reminded of the importance and the power that comes when trusting in God.

We heard the call from Jesus to follow him in the season of Epiphany, and now it's our time to respond. We begin the journey in the wilderness with self-reflection. Do you trust in God? Where will this trust in God lead you? Where will this trust lead this community of faith? How will we live trust intentionally? How will we abide in God intentionally so we can truly be a vessel of love in this world? Trusting in God is a choice, and over the next 40 days, we will learn from Jesus, we will be challenged by Jesus' teachings. We will be called to act in love; to love fiercely in the face of violence; to stand up to politicians and leaders who spread falsehoods.

The quote on the front of the bulletin says: "When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace." Jimi Hendrix said this. The devil wanted the love of power to win, but Jesus chooses a different path. Jesus responds in love that shows faith in the face of trials, troubles, temptations and testing, even when that path is going to be more difficult to follow. Even when that path may make us stumble. Trusting in God means that together, we will find a way to love. Love as Jesus has called us. In a way that stands together in the face of things that are horrible in this world. When we love as Jesus has called us to love, it's not love of

¹ Kimberly Van Driel, *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Volume 2, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), p. 47.

power. When the devil tempted Jesus to throw himself off of that temple, to get God to save him, he did not put God to the test. What are we going to do in this time of Lent? What are we being called to do? May we trust in God, and may we make space for God in our lives.