

St. Thomas's Episcopal Parish
Newark, DE
The First Sunday of Lent – March 5, 2017/Year A
Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11
The Reverend Paul W. Gennett, Jr.

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May my words reveal the greater glory of God.

AMEN

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Relevant ... Spectacular ... Powerful! These images may conjure thoughts of necessary components for a successful candidate for political office in our day. This is not where we first encounter them. Although in our current political climate, a fourth image needs to be included – **MONEY** and lots of it, or big pocketed donors. I still chuckle at the image floating on social media in this past election cycle. One of our national political figures standing in front of our Capital building, and his suit covered with NASCAR-like sponsor patches of big pocketed donors. Maybe not as much of a chuckle now as then?

Relevant ... Spectacular ... Powerful! I first encountered this image in a little book titled **In the Name of Jesus**, written by Henri Nouwen. Nouwen reflects on today's Gospel story in relation to his life. A life of great recognition as a spiritual writer, an Ivy League professor of rank and stature, now living in the L'Arche community in Toronto, Canada. A community where the disabled persons live independently with the aid of caregivers, which is what Nouwen had become. As he reflected, **"My partner could care less about the number of books I wrote, or how much I was sought after as a speaker and teacher. He just cared that I made sure his eggs and bacon were just the way he liked them every morning."**

Relevant ... Spectacular ... Powerful! As we begin this journey in Lent, the temptations of Jesus is the traditional Gospel read for the First Sunday in Lent. It is the first station in our forty day journey with Jesus, and our invitation to listen with heart's ears how these temptations are real for you right here, right now.

Relevant ... Spectacular ... Powerful! As the current parlance goes – **been there ... done that ... thank you, Jesus!**

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Lent is the annual invitation of faith calling us into those places of examination and repentance, individually and corporately. Yet they are still places we more often avoid, rationalize, or simply deny. With ash on your forehead, the mark of our mortality over the mark of eternity made at baptism, our birth and our dying are inextricably intertwined. When we enter this season with open hearts to journey with Jesus, it can be a time of profound life-giving and life-changing possibilities. If we avoid this holy work, we will simply live in fear and avoidance.

Temptations are ever with us. They can be as real as the need for food, shelter, and personal security, or as subtle as self-aggrandizement and self-gratification at the expense of others, and at the expense of our soul's health as well. Watch any commercial around professional sports events and the message seems clear – **Take care of #1 ... the strong get stronger, the weak go away ... I am better than everyone and everything!** These messages may meet our needs for a time, but as alcohol or drugs take control of the addicted one, these grandiose behaviors need feeding, and they do not care how they are fed or who and what is damaged to accomplish this feeding. **"No man is an island"** wrote 17th century poet and priest John Donne. **All that we do, and all that we are, affects others.**

The first temptation, **be relevant** – *"The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."* We remember the people of Israel in their forty year journey, constantly railing against Moses, against God, for MORE food, MORE bread, MORE water, MORE ... Jesus response echoes the words of Moses that, *"One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."* We too need the spiritual feeding by our daily diet of reading scripture, prayer and meditation, for our soul's nourishment for this life. **Jesus rejects being relevant to be humble.**

The second temptation, **be spectacular** – *"Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"* How often have our own "foxhole prayers" been for Divine protection in a time of life crisis, only to return to patterns of spiritual paucity soon after our delivery? Using scripture as a weapon, prodding at the essence of the life Jesus is called to live in God's will and ways, to glorify God and God alone – *"Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"* **Jesus rejects being spectacular to be faithful.**

The third temptation, **be powerful** – *"Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."* All subtlety, all guile, and all pretense is stripped to its core. The tempter "calls the question" to Jesus whom it now sees as the One with God. We are still bedazzled by the glitter of the world, and it still blinds us from the soul nourishment for us, for the world. There is STILL much brokenness and anxiety in our families and our social systems, soul sickness in our leaders, impoverishment physically and spiritually, and the stark ignorance of our **stewardship NOT ownership** of *"this fragile earth, our island home."*

The only response to the tempter's power is with spiritual power – *"Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan; for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"* Living in the true power of God's love, we join Jesus as faithful co-creators of God's kingdom come, the kingdom of health in body and spirit, mutual care and respect for ALL God's created, and the growing of the community of love and freedom, here and now. **Jesus rejects being powerful to be vulnerable.**

. **“Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return”** we heard on Ash Wednesday. Another spiritual writer and teacher Marianne Williamson writes this ...

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are *powerful beyond measure*. We ask ourselves, ‘Who am I to be – brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous, adored and worshiped? No, you are a child of God. We are born to manifest the glory of God that is in [each and every one of us]. As we let our [Love] light shine, we share the power of Love with others to do the same.’”

So ... *Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?*

AMEN