

## **Union United Methodist Church**

Sermon Outline: **Lent: Purpose, and Fasting That Pleases the Lord**

February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Pastor Michael Larbi

Readings: **Isaiah 58; Matthew 4:1-11**

### **1. Purpose of Lent; Invitation to Self-Examination and Repentance**

"The early Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church that before the Easter celebration there should be a forty-day season of spiritual preparation.

During this season converts to the faith were prepared for Holy Baptism. It was also a time when persons who had committed serious sins and had separated themselves from the community of faith were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness, and restored to participation in the life of the Church.

In this way the whole congregation was reminded of the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the need we all have to renew our faith.

I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to observe a holy Lent: by self-examination and repentance"

The United Methodist Book of Worship (p. 391).

### **2. Renewal, Fasting, Temptations**

#### **a. Temptation of Jesus**

Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One. He was anointed with the Holy Spirit when he took on human form in first century Palestine. Yet,

"Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." Matthew 4:1 NRSV

If Jesus the Christ was tempted, we should not think we won't be temptation.

The devil still uses the same tricks to tempt us that he used to tempt Jesus.

John summarizes the main ways in which we are tempted:

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; **16for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world.** **17**And the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever.”

1 John 2:15-17 NRSV

“For all that *is* in the world—**the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life**—is not of the Father but is of the world”

1 John 2:16 NKJV

- **What was Jesus tempted with?**

- **Desire of the flesh**

Matthew 4:3 NRSV

3The tempter came and said to him,

**“If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”**

**4**But he answered,

**“It is written, [ Deuteronomy 8:3]**

**‘One does not live by bread alone,**

**but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”**

- **Pride of riches (pride of life - NKJV)**

Matthew 4:5-7NRSV

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, **6**saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, [Psalm 91:11-12]

‘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.’ ”

7 Jesus said to him,

**"Again it is written, [Deuteronomy 6:16]**

**'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' "**

o **Desire of the eyes**

Matthew 4:8-11 NRSV

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; 9 and he said to him, **"All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."** 10 Jesus said to him,

**"Away with you, Satan! for it is written, [Deuteronomy 6:13]**

**'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'**

**How did Jesus overcome temptation?** Again and again, with the what the written word of God says. This is our example too.

b. Dealing with temptations, resisting the devil?

**"Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith,** because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

1 Peter 5:8-9 NIV

"He [God] gives all the more grace; therefore it says,

"God opposes the proud,

but gives grace to the humble."

**Submit yourselves therefore to God.**

**Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."**

James 4:6-7 NRSV

c. **Limit when tempted.**

We are only tested with what we can handle. **"No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it." I Cor. 10:13 NIV**

### 3. The Lord's Chosen Fast

- **Why Some Fasts Don't Impress God - Isaiah 58:3-4 NRSV**

The Israelites complained that their fasting was not yielding the right results:

3 "Why do we fast, but you do not see?  
Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?"  
Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day,  
and oppress all your workers.  
4 Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight  
and to strike with a wicked fist.  
Such fasting as you do today  
will not make your voice heard on high.

- **Fasting that impresses God & yields results - Isaiah 58:6-7 NRSV**

**6 Is not this the fast that I choose:**  
to loose the bonds of injustice,  
to undo the thongs of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to break every yoke?  
7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,  
and bring the homeless poor into your house;  
when you see the naked, to cover them,  
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

Recall what Jesus said he came to do because of the Spirit on Him, because he is Anointed:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."  
Luke 4:18-19 NRSV (quoting Isaiah 61:1-2)

Thus, we see that in fasting in the right way, we bring the power of Christ to bear on injustice, letting the oppressed go free, breaking every yoke that people experience. This is our calling and privilege. We are to do this both in prayer and in practical ways – just as Jesus did.

- **Right fasting, Great Results! Isaiah 58:8-12 NRSV**

8Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing shall spring up quickly;

your vindicator shall go before you,  
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.

9Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;  
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

If you remove the yoke from among you,  
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,

10if you offer your food to the hungry  
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,  
then your light shall rise in the darkness  
and your gloom be like the noonday.

11The Lord will guide you continually,  
and satisfy your needs in parched places,  
and make your bones strong;

and you shall be like a watered garden,  
like a spring of water,  
whose waters never fail.

12Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;  
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;