

**Rev. Mike Cole**  
**Providence Presbyterian Church**  
**First Sunday in Lent**  
**March 9, 2025**  
**Psalm 91:1-2,9-16; Luke 4:1-13**

**"Been There, Done That"**

Last summer, my son, Colin and I signed up for fly fishing lessons. We had always talked about learning to fly fish and finally decided to take a couple of lessons because we knew next to nothing about fly fishing. We looked for a guide with lots of experience who could give us basic instructions so that we could eventually fish on our own. We needed someone who had been there and done that.

Back when I was in junior high school, I was caught doing something I shouldn't have been doing. I was taken to the coach's office. Everyone knew that this was the worst place to be taken for discipline, because our coach seemed to delight in wielding a horrific paddle that was a wood softball bat whose barrel was cut in half, lengthwise. To make matters worse, the barrel of the bat had multiple holes drilled in it. I was not the only one implicated, so when one of my cohorts came out of the coach's office, I was the first one to ask him how it went. The look of terror in his eyes was all I needed to know that I was in for it. I didn't get any real comfort from what he said, but it did settle an existential question for me - like, would I live through it.

Life is like that. Unless we are absolute risk takers, it comforts us to know that someone has gone before us and has learned from the experience. ~~On this first Sunday in Lent, Jesus~~ shows us how to face temptation and not allow it consume us. Jesus can challenge us to be courageous in the face of temptation because he has endured it, but not allowed it to defeat him. He can call us to resist temptation because he has overcome it, but not allowed it to undo him. He successfully dealt with temptation on not just one occasion in the middle of the wilderness, but throughout his life.

What happened to him in the wilderness was a microcosm of his whole life. In fact, it is a miniature rendering of the temptations we all face. The first temptation was not only to make a stone into a loaf of bread to satisfy his hunger after forty days of fasting, it was also the temptation not to fulfill a vow. No one told Jesus that he had to fast for forty days when he went into the wilderness. That was a decision he made for himself. I assume that he made a vow to God, because that is the only way a person can endure a forty day fast in the

desert. Thus, when the devil tempted Jesus with the challenge to change a stone into bread, he was subverting Jesus' vow to God.

Making a vow to God is serious business, although you couldn't tell it by the low priority society seems to place on it. The problem is that people try to treat their vows to God the same way they treat their vows to each other. These days, folks regularly break vows made to one another - the vow of marriage, the vow of fidelity, the vow of honesty, and the vow of integrity, to name just a few. Society has lost all sense of a person's word being their bond in our dealings with one another. Is it any wonder then, that people treat God the same way?

But in Jesus, we find someone whose word is his commitment. Jesus will not betray his vow even when confronted by great temptation. Jesus' response to the devil's challenge to transform a stone into bread is to quote scripture: "One does not live by bread alone." In the end, Jesus turns the tables on the devil by transforming not a stone, but himself into the bread of life for all humankind.

The second temptation Jesus confronted was the acquisition of power. "All you have to do is transfer your allegiance to me," said the devil, "and I will make you the CEO of Microsoft." But Jesus pledges allegiance to no one other than God. Which is more than I can say for us. We may give lip service to God, but we know who we really serve. If we take Jesus' words to heart, all we need to do is see what we treasure and we will find where our allegiance really is.

Just look at how we pay our bills. When do we pay our tithe? Is it the first check we write? If not, why not? What does that communicate about our priorities? Money is not our only treasure. Time is a treasure, too. The older we get, the more apparent that becomes. When we are young, we think that we have all the time in the world, and so we tend to put off some decisions - among them, the decision to worship and serve God. But with the passing of years, many of us realize that we have spent our time on things that really don't matter - things that provide temporary pleasure.

What better time than Lent to re-order our time priorities to reflect our true allegiance? Use this Lenten season as a time to reestablish our allegiance to God. Jesus acknowledged his allegiance by quoting scripture: "Worship the lord your God, and serve only him." When the devil puts lots of tempting treasures before us, we need to follow Jesus' example and resist those temptations to transfer our allegiance.

The last temptation of Jesus was perhaps the most diabolical of all, because it seemed so simple. "Make a deal with God," said the devil. "He doesn't mind being tested." The devil knew that although God listens patiently to our pleas, God doesn't make deals with us. We

can't go to God with a promise to do something if God does something for us first. God doesn't work like that. God does hear our prayers and answers every one, but sometimes the answer is, "No," or "Not yet." God wants our faithfulness, not our bargains. In return for our faithfulness, God promises to stand with us, come what may.

When we tell God, "Just get me through this and I'll go to church every Sunday," or "If you'll get me an 'A' on this test I haven't studied for, I promise that I'll study from now on," or "Lord, get me this job and I'll increase my giving to the church" - when we set conditions on our response, we put the lie to our faithfulness. It is egocentrism of the worst kind to presume to tell God how the Lord has to behave. And then to put a condition on it at that, is the height of folly.

In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God already completed the divine end of the bargain with us. Now, it is up to us to respond, not with another bargain of our own, but with faithfulness and trust. Jesus countered the temptation to strike a deal with God, again by quoting scripture a third time: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." He knew that we are the ones being tested in life, not God.

When we face temptations and trials, it is comforting to know that Jesus has been there. But do you know what is even better? Knowing that he hasn't done that. He didn't yield to the temptation. When we are tempted, we have in Jesus Christ one who has "been there, and **NOT** done that." What better example could we follow?

Imagine the joy of saying to anyone who looks to us for guidance and direction regarding temptation, "Been there, **NOT** done that!" When we accept the challenge to follow Jesus' lead, that's just what we can say. Been there and NOT done that! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**THE CHARGE:** Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God will equip you. God will accomplish a purpose in your being there. Christ who dwells within you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in God's grace, love and power. Amen