

March 9, 2014

Psalm 32:1-11

- ¹Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.
²Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.
³While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.
⁴For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah
⁵Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah
⁶Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them.
⁷You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance. Selah
⁸I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.
⁹Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you.
¹⁰Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD.
¹¹Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” ⁴But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” ⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying 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.’” ⁷Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” ¹¹Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

March 9, 2014 – Habits of the Heart



Presbyterian Church in Geneva
Children's Sermon for the First Sunday of Lent
March 9, 2014

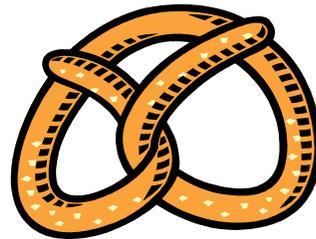
Give up or Take on? By Pastor Deb Lind-Schmitz

Today is the First Sunday in Lent. There are forty days not counting Sundays from Ash Wednesday to Easter. For some people this is a time to give up candy or sweets, like chocolate. For others Lent is a time to give up eating meat on Friday. That is why there are so many Fish Deals on Friday. What else do people give up for Lent? Swearing, _____, _____, _____.

Now I would like you to think of Lent as a time to not just "give up" but to "take on" an activity that will bring you closer to God. If you give up buying candy, eat something healthy like a carrot or give money to the community lunch program for the poor. Give up watching television or video games for a half hour and pray or talk to your parents about the Bible.

If Lent is about getting closer to God, what should we do? Pray, read the Bible, and come to church. Yes.

Many hundreds of years ago, around 400 to 600 AD, there was a monk who wanted to remind children to pray during Lent. In those days, the monks baked the bread for communion and daily meals. So, this monk had an idea for kids. He rolled the dough in a long rope and twisted it so it looked like children's arms crossing their chest like this. Turn a pretzel upside down and it looks just like this.



Today is Pretzel Sunday! After church you can get a pretzel to eat. Just remember that Pretzel and Prayer.

eat.

My pledge for Lent

What will you give up?

What will you take on?

March 9, 2014 – Habits of the Heart

“Habits of the Heart” preached on March 9, 2014

A little more than a month ago, I thought my health was good except for my backache and extra weight. Then, one day I seemed to have the flu with all those wonderful viral symptoms. I called the doctor after 24 hours of strange pains in my chest and back. Then, I drove to the ER after delivering the bulletin material to Edna May. Quite convinced my problem was acid reflex, GERD or the flu, I was in shock when the cardiologist said, “Deb, You are having a heart attack. We are transporting you to Strong Memorial where they will place a stent in the blocked artery. You are going to be alright.” The circumflex artery was 100 percent blocked. Shocked by the news and grateful for excellent and immediate care were my immediate responses.

Afterward, my private personality pulled away into a solitary space so my heart could heal. Caring friends, neighbors and family called on me and lifted my spirit. Doctors, nurses, and cardiac rehab nurses have taught me habits for a healthy heart. I have learned a few things about the heart and body.

The heart has a wondrous capacity to heal itself, sometimes creating its own bypasses. Even when the body is damaged, the body adapts to changes and can be very resilient. The mind and spirit also adapts and accommodates these changes. I have discover the necessity of “letting go” of unhealthy habits and attitudes and “taking on” new disciplines for life.

There is a Lenten lesson here for all of us especially after last Sunday’s congregational meeting. I think this church had something similar to a heart attack. Although, we all thought the church was healthy, the heart seemed to go into cardiac arrest. The whole body of Christ was affected. Shock, sadness, anger, fear, you name it. People walked away stunned, confused and concerned about the future. A week later, many conversations, prayers and hugs have been shared. I know that behind the scenes, people have been talking, listening, encouraging, reconciling and recovering.

I will say that the Holy Spirit had to be working overtime healing the heart of this congregation. As children and parents gathered for Tuesday’s pancake dinner, laughter filled the fellowship hall as children raced with pancakes on their spatulas, flipping them in the air.

God’s Spirit was leading the Ash Wednesday services when the interfaith community gathered for breakfast. “Give up or take on” was my sermon title for both the morning as well as the evening services. Just like the children’s sermon this morning, I asked people to “Give up or Take on”. And, it is worth saying again and again. It’s time to Give it up to God and take on a spiritual discipline that brings you closer to God. Give up their hurt, disappointment, the resentment that burden you and give it up to God.

Take on a spiritual discipline for Lent that will bring you back to the heart of God. Quiet meditation, prayer walks, Bible study and heart to heart conversations God. I believe that you will develop a deeper faith, a better understanding of the scriptures, and a closer relationship with God.

In the Gospel of Matthew 4, we read that when Jesus went into the wilderness, or a place of desolation, he was led by the Spirit of God. This was right after his baptism by John and the glorious affirmation of God, “This is my beloved Son!” It seems like quite a roller coaster. Yet, I believe, this wilderness trial was preparation for the ministry yet to come. Jesus deliberately pulled away from the crowds to this deserted place led by the advocate, the Spirit, questioned by the adversary, Satan and then ministered

by angels, messengers of God. Now I checked the Greek translation this week and made sure that my word substitutes were correct. So, when I refer to the devil, I will use the word adversary. There were three temptations or tests of Jesus. Like a court trial, the adversary, “diabolou” tried Jesus after he fasted for the traditional number of days. In this weakened and hungry state, the adversary pointed to stones trying him, he said, “If you are the Son of God make these stones into bread”.

The scriptures must have been written on his heart for Jesus replied with reference to Deuteronomy 8:3 which I will quote from that passage as it refers to the hungry Israelites in the wilderness; “God (he) humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. “ Later the angels did feed Jesus. But, for that moment, his nourishment was God’s word.

The second temptation transported Jesus like a modern day movie to the Holy City at the pinnacle of the Jerusalem temple. The adversary now uses Psalm 91, a favorite trust psalm sung at funerals, On Eagle’s Wings. But, the adversary says in so many words, “Show the people you are the Son of God by throw yourself down. God’s angels will catch you”. Later Jesus would face that same temptation to have God intervene and save him from death. Instead, Jesus answers with a passage from Deuteronomy 6:16. “Do not test God”. Think of the many times we have concluded that God is not with us just because we have been disappointed that God didn’t intervene.

The third and last test concerns fame and fortune. The adversary brings Jesus to a place where he can see all the nations of the world. Here is when the movie, the Devil’s Advocate comes to mind. Standing at the top of a New York City building overlooking the most powerful and richest businesses, the Devil says, “Come work for me, Son. It will be a family business.” In the Gospel account Jesus is up on the mountaintop which is reminiscent of where Moses received the Ten Commandments. And, Jesus responds with the essence of the first commandments, (Deuteronomy 6:13). But, first he has the confidence and authority to say, “Get away from me, Satan”. “Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.” And, the adversary or devil left Jesus and the angels, messengers of God ministered to him.

So what does this close reading of the Matthew test say to you today? Here is what I believe. Our struggles with scriptures, the debates we have in our minds or in our congregations have the potential to deepen our understanding and faith. Tests of faith are not welcome or sought after, usually. But, we can be enriched and strengthened by the experience. When I was attending seminary, I had several tests of faith. I grew up in a family with Baptist ministers for great grandfathers and great gospel music. My parents, on the other hand chose to join a liberal, University Presbyterian Church, Macalester Plymouth (to be exact Presbyterian and Congregational). Plus, the actions of parents and church were very accepting and inclusive. Seminary made me look at the paradoxes and theological conflicts. I had a crisis of faith. An elder at my supporting church said to me, “Once you get through this your faith will be deeper and stronger. When roots of a tree are too shallow they can not stiff wind. Deal with questions and your faith will be stronger, because the roots will go deeper and expand. Then, your theology and faith will be able to weather storm. I believe that you as individuals and as a church will grow in understanding and faith. One of scriptures from Ash Wednesday was “Where your treasure is, your heart is also”. Believe in your hearts, that God will guide us through the wilderness preparing us for the future.