

March 1, 2009 Lent 1

Rev Debbie Gara

Scripture: Mark 1:9-15

“Taming Temptation”

Showing of “Nooma” DVD “Tomato” with Rob Bell- 13 min.

Did you notice the character in red shoes that was hanging around in each scene? Always feeding himself and never engaging in the relationships, but lingering with a quirky expression of enticement to another way, always there. The constant, ever present draw of temptation in our lives.

As soon as Jesus was attested Son of God at his baptism, “the spirit immediately drove him into the wilderness.” Christ’s commissioning meant conflict and struggle: our walk with Christ in life means conflict and struggle will always be present.

Our Gospel lesson today provides a strong clue which situates the struggle of forty days theologically. Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness parallel Israel’s forty years in the wilderness, Moses’ forty days on Sinai, Elijah’s forty day trip to Horeb. In addition to the number forty, common in all of these allusions is the crisis induced by a sense of the absence of God. The wilderness is the dwelling place of forces hostile to God. Yet, despite appearances and feelings, God is present. The discovery of this presence and this providence grows out of struggle and of testing.

As with identification with Christ, Son of God, we are children of God, so with him we may expect to be driven, enticed into wilderness, caught in the battle. The text contains for us, as it does for Jesus, the warning of the tempting and **the promise of the angels.**

We enter the season of Lent, the journey of the story of Jesus Christ through his days toward death on the cross, a time of invitation to enter the truth in our lives, sometimes very hard truths, of what God is calling us to put to death as we journey with Jesus into death in order for new life to be born.

And if we Christians really *do* enter the story, we *are* called to face the hard truth of the lingering temptations in our lives that slowly and persistently eat at our souls, that entice us into behaviors, actions, and feelings that create barriers to our ability to fully embrace the love of God and our full worth as God's created children.

The ever present tempter manifests itself uniquely in each of us as uniquely created individuals, but creates much of the same result, for as we succumb to that which sucks a part of our worth we are cutting short or even prohibiting God's full love and power to inhabit our being.

Perhaps the tempter is that force which has placed a barrier in a relationship with someone in your life, a spouse, partner, relative, friend, somewhere along the way resentment and unresolved differences developed, somewhere along the way hurt grew, judgment overcame grace and acceptance. It's not unusual for these disconnections and thorns in relationships to linger and survive so long that the original cause cannot be recalled.

Perhaps the tempter is a lingering disillusionment with life circumstances... unemployment, illness, unjust action, which manifests itself in a feeling that life is not fair. That's true, but the further place that continues to thrive is one of being a

victim. Holding on to the place of being a victim has a next step, 'I am entitled to something from others and from life because I have been treated unjustly. I NEED something, I DESERVE something.' It is what is invited from, or results from this attitude that is the harmful side of this place, that is, I deserve more, I am more worthy than others... continuing in this journey most certainly leads to the hurt of others, or the hurt of oneself. We can all, at one time or another succumb to the attitude of being a victim, it is whether we choose to allow this to live. Alone, without the power of God, we can find plenty of ways to feed this temptation.

Perhaps the lingering tempter is an addiction, often if not always pursued as a result of those places previously named. Addictive substances or behaviors so readily available and so easily found all around. The addiction is often a substance that tricks our mind into feeling happy, energetic, numb, non-caring, euphoric.

And the tempter is full of tricks, conniving and clever. It allows us to play the game of reasoning with ourselves to the point of figuring out all the ways we are justified in our behavior. Thinking that we are more right; striving to equal the score, but with the consequence of demeaning another in order to bring ourselves up.

The true embracing of our most harmful temptations, those that keep us furthest away from God and others, combined with a true embracing of God's grace and forgiveness through Christ, means that we are lured in a new way, a new direction, enticed by the spirit of God who lives in us. It is to evaluate all that we do and all that we choose by the power of Christ who bids us... simply put, to do no harm, do good, and to stay in love with God. Each feeding the other in an intertwining of Christ invading our soul. To embrace this fully means we put to death, over and over again, the lingering character in the red shoes who bids us

to care more for ourselves than those around us, who bids us to feed our darkness so that it continues to thrive and grow.

As we really let those harmful temptations go, as we give them to God, new life and love will enter that place, a new fulfillment in life will be apparent for us.

That is the promise we are given, that is the assurance that we are called to trust; our gift from our Creator.

As we enter Lent we enter the promise that as we participate in the journey of Jesus through these 40 days, we will be with him in the the journey of entering the painful places that tempt us away from God. As we ask Christ to take those places that need to die, we **WILL** find a great new place, a great new life with Christ... so let us enter this journey of death into new life... miracles await... thanks be to God!