

Gospel lesson

Our Lenten gospel for today looks at the temptation to sin and Jesus's response to it.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/gnpi-014-jesus-temptation/>;
credit: Good News Productions International and College Press Publishing

Matthew 4:1-11

NRSV

¹Then 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.'"

⁷ Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

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

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

The Word of God for the people of God

<Children's/Interactive time>

Will you draw a picture with me? <Let them respond; provide paper/pens, etc.>

What happens if you crumple the paper? Will you be able to draw as nice of a picture on it?

<Let them respond>

What if you tear a part of it? <Demonstrate; Let them respond>

If you tear the paper, you cannot draw a normal picture on it. Can we fix the tear? How?

<Let them respond>

What happens with a torn paper, if instead of trying

to fix it, we incorporate the tear into the picture?
<Let them respond>

What if you fold down your tear and hold up your page in front of someone else's? What are you helping viewers to focus on in that other person's work?
<Let them respond>

God told Adam and Eve not to eat from one of the trees in the garden or they would die. What did Eve and then Adam do? <Let them respond>

Do you think the human condition could ever be the same after that? Could they go back to living as if it had never happened? <Let them respond>

What do you think God wants us to do with sin in this world, in our lives? Just give up on it like a torn paper for drawing, give in to temptation and let our lives be shredded into confetti? <Let them respond>

What about humbling ourselves to show the beauty in someone else's life? How can we help people to see the good in others more? <Let them respond>

God loves us and always wants the best for us. May we always be willing to listen to our Lord and strive to make God's love more known in our world.

<Hymn "Jesus, Tempted in the Desert">

TFWS #2105>

Message: Mercy on the Wilderness Road



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/renewed-in-mercy/first-sunday-in-lent-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/first-sunday-in-lent-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Merciful and transformative God, as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That through our service for You, Your disruptive grace may transform the wilderness roads of our lives into a world filled with love and mercy. Amen.

Today we begin our Lenten series "Renewed in Mercy" with "Mercy on the Wilderness Road":

"The First Sunday in Lent invites us to consider how to set the space for the journey ahead."

Those of you who were fortunate enough to attend Dietrich Bertholf's presentation on Artificial Intelligence (AI) last Thursday know that he described it as "disruptive technology."

Like the invention of cars at first

- did not have rules of the road,
- did not even have paved roads to drive on,
- scared the horses most people did use for transport,
- and without safety features, resulted in much more severe accidents at relatively low speeds,

AI currently is causing all kinds of problems for society.

People need to learn how to properly use such disruptive technology before we can relax into using it in everyday life – and even then, we still have to pay attention to what we are doing to prevent catastrophes. It can be a very rough ride getting from the initial invention to safe applications of it.

Learning to live in God's love, humanity has struggled with disruptive grace.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/cd-the-fall/>;
credit: Carolyn Dyk/
Wycliffe Bible Translator

When God set Adam and Eve in the garden, they had the gift of free choice; for the new Creation, that was a disruptive grace. Unhindered by the overwhelming direct presence of our Creator, both Eve and Adam exercised their ability to choose. Their innocence was destroyed; they – and indeed, all of creation – could never go back to what they were before disobeying God.

They knew something was not right, and tried to fix it. However, what they fixed – their nakedness – was not the real problem. They had broken their relationship with God, but instead of seeking to fix that, they tried to hide their wrongdoing. It is possible they were in some kind of denial, until God confronted them about it.

People to this day try to hide their wrongdoing or even deny that they did anything wrong. The psalmist

refers to such things back in the days of King David, talking about being blessed for acknowledging instead of hiding his sin, as if hiding sin was commonplace.

Usually, when someone makes a mistake about something that matters to them, they get stressed. And how do stressed people tend to act? They get angry more easily, defensive instead of cooperative, maybe try to reduce the impact of the problem by hiding it - even if it was not they who created the problem to begin with. All of this exacerbates the situation instead of fixing it. Unfortunately, all-too-often, we each get caught up in cyclical traps brought on by sin.

It gets really frightening when you think about how the sin of previous generations affects us today. Systemic racism, mysogeny, and other past cruelties cause children and adults today to have vastly unequal opportunities within the same society. How can anyone undo what has been building for millenia?

God understands and seeks to help us be free of sin. Paul talks about "the free gift in the grace of ... Jesus Christ." Adam's act brought death through sin into the world; Jesus's act brought new life through love into the world. In the face of pressure to sin, obedience to God brings transformation of the old into new creation.

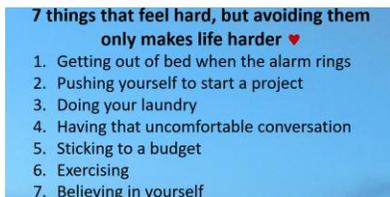
In every instance in the Gospels where there is temptation for sin, when God is obeyed, we see the transformative power of disruptive grace at work. Today's reading is one of the more notable occasions, for we see Jesus sorely tempted - perhaps second only

to the cross in terms of pressure to turn aside from God's directives. Jesus's powerful ministry was made possible through obedience to God.

The devil reminded Jesus – who was famished after a prolonged fast – that He could use supernatural powers to feed Himself. But how was humanity supposed to relate to God as fully human if He used the almighty power of Creation to make bread instead of surviving through normal (human) means? If He got to do that, what about the rest of us?

Only God knows what the full impact of our requests is, i.e., what is good for Creation; therefore, we need to live according to what God tells us, not demand miracles simply because we do not want to do the work necessary for what we want.

Arsalan Moin posted on Facebook



concepts posted by Arsalan Moin on July 31, 2025 at <https://www.facebook.com/psychological.treatment/posts/7-things-that-feel-hard-but-avoiding-them-only-makes-life-harder-%EF%B8%8F/1295928845229874/>

7 things that feel hard, but avoiding them only makes life harder:¹

1. Getting out of bed when the alarm rings feels hard, but waking up late makes your life harder.
2. Pushing yourself to start a project feels hard, but procrastinating makes your life even harder.
3. Doing your laundry feels hard, but letting it pile

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up makes life even harder.

4. Having that uncomfortable conversation feels hard, but avoiding it makes life a lot harder.
5. Sticking to a budget feels hard, but racking up debt makes every part of your life harder.
6. Exercising feels hard, but letting your health go makes living your life harder.
7. Believing in yourself feels hard, but doubting yourself makes life harder.



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/renewed-in-mercy/first-sunday-in-lent-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/first-sunday-in-lent-year-a-graphics>

It feels like disruptive grace, being told to do what we can instead of expecting things done for us. Show mercy to yourself on this wilderness road of life, and take care of what you need.

We should also avoid taking unnecessary risks, as Jesus did in refusing to jump off the temple. Just because we can, does not mean we should. Even if we survive, others who try to copy us could get hurt – and for what gain? Who does it help? How are we showing love in showing off? Show mercy to others on this wilderness road of life, and be mindful of what they need.

And then there's the idolatry temptation. What use is gaining the entire world if we have to cut ourselves off from our only source of life? It is heartbreaking for me to see news today about leaders who seem to have sold their souls for money and power, because

ultimately it brings devastation for the people they lead and an eventual collapse of all that they have.

Human prosperity requires working together to thrive. We know this from history as well as from what Jesus taught, what God's law directs, and what the Holy Spirit guides us to. We can get to a better place than where we are today as a society through the disruptive grace of God's love. Show mercy to society on this wilderness road of life, and follow God's law.

Let's start this Lent with daily grace and guidance.

- ✝ Take time daily to breathe, to reconnect with God
- ✝ Confess your sins before the Lord. What do you want to work on changing in your life this Lent? Start today, if you did not already begin last Wednesday.
- ✝ Be patient with others, for you are not walking in their shoes. We do not know the full pressures addressing one another. Let God's grace be felt through the patience you show them (and yourself!).
- ✝ Seek God's guidance to a better way for all. That may look like the renewal of some old ways, it may be modifying current ways, or it may be something completely new.

Love God with all that you are, and share that love with others wherever you can. Trust the Holy Spirit to transform the world with disruptive grace, when (as Jesus taught) you bring mercy on this wilderness road – and watch for the new life that begins.