

“The Longing Beneath the Temptation”

Genesis 2:15–17; 3:1–7 • Psalm 32 • Romans 5:12–19 • Matthew 4:1–11

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Beloved in Christ, Lent always begins in the wilderness. Not just the wilderness of sand and stone, but the wilderness inside us; the places where we hunger, where we ache, where we reach for something that promises life but cannot deliver it.

Today’s scriptures invite us to look honestly at that wilderness, not to shame us, but to show us the God who meets us there.

We begin with the first temptation. In Genesis, the story begins in a garden, lush, abundant, safe. God places the human beings there “to till it and keep it,” to live in harmony with God and creation.

But then comes the serpent with a question that still echoes through human history: “Did God really say...?”

It’s not a command. It’s not even an accusation. It’s a seed of doubt. A whisper that suggests God is holding out on us. A suggestion that maybe we could be more, have more, control more, if only we reached for the fruit.

And so as the story goes, they reach. Not because they are wicked, but because they are human. Because they long for wisdom. Because they want to be secure. Because they want to be enough. Because they want to feel like their in control!

And suddenly the garden feels different. Their eyes are opened, but not in the way they hoped. Shame enters the story. Fear enters the story. Hiding enters the story. And if we're honest, we know that story well.

In our Psalm, we hear the words: "When I kept silent..." Psalm 32 gives voice to what happens when we try to hide from God. "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away."

We know that feeling, the heaviness of carrying what we cannot fix, the exhaustion of pretending we're fine.

But then the psalm turns: "I acknowledged my sin to you... and you forgave."

The psalmist discovers what Adam and Eve could not yet imagine: God does not meet our hiding with punishment. God meets our hiding with mercy.

Lent is not about beating ourselves up. It is about stepping out of the bushes and letting God see us, really see us, so that healing can begin.

Paul, in our reading from Romans, draws a sweeping line from Adam to Christ. Through one human being, sin and death entered the world. Through another, grace and life overflow.

Paul isn't interested in blaming Adam. He's interested in showing us that the story of humanity does not end in the garden.

Where the first Adam reached for what was forbidden, the second Adam, Jesus, releases what is offered.

Where the first Adam grasped, Jesus lets go.

Where the first Adam hides, Jesus stands exposed in the wilderness, hungry and alone, and still chooses trust.

Jesus in the Wilderness is the story of the temptation beneath the temptation. Matthew tells us that Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness. Not by accident or as punishment. Jesus is led as a preparation for what is to come.

And the temptations he faces are not random. They are the same temptations that echo through every human heart.

Temptation number one: “Turn these stones to bread.” The temptation to meet our hunger, physical, emotional, spiritual, on our own terms. Our sin is to believe that God is too slow, too distant, too unreliable to meet our every need.

Temptation number two: “Throw yourself down.” The temptation to demand proof from God. To make God perform. To turn faith into a transaction.

Temptation number three: “Bow down and I will give you the kingdoms.” The temptation to seize power, to control outcomes, to avoid the hard road of selfless love, compassion and empathy.

Each temptation is a shortcut. Each one whispers the same ancient lie: “You don’t have to trust God. You can do this yourself.”

But Jesus answers each temptation with the Word of God, not as a weapon, but as a grounding. He stands where Adam fell. He trusts where Adam doubted. He remains open where Adam hid. And in doing so, he rewrites the human story.

So, what does this means for us?

Lent is not about pretending we are Jesus in the wilderness. Lent is about admitting we are Adam and Eve in the garden.

We reach for the fruit. We hide. We listen to the wrong voices. We long for what cannot satisfy. We hurt and harm each other in the process.

But the good news is this: Jesus has already walked the wilderness for us. He has already faced the tempter. He has already opened the way back to trust, back to mercy, back to life.

Lent is not a journey toward God’s forgiveness. It is a journey with God’s forgiveness already given. We begin this season not with fear, but with grace; not with shame, but with honesty. We begin this season not with despair, but with hope.

Maybe there is a place in your life right now where you feel the serpent’s whisper: “Did God really say...?” Maybe there is a hunger you’re trying to fill on your own. Maybe there is a

fear that keeps you hiding. Maybe there is a shortcut that looks easier than trust in God's divine wisdom.

Hear this: God is not waiting to punish us. God is waiting to meet us. In the garden. In the wilderness. In the places we least expect; in the failures, the hurting and the shadow of our sins. The good news is God's mercy is already running toward us, just where we are.

As we begin this Lenten journey, may we walk with Jesus into the wilderness, not to prove ourselves, but to discover again the One who has already overcome temptation.

May we step out of hiding and into the light of God's mercy. May we trust that grace is stronger than sin, that love is stronger than fear, and that Christ has already rewritten our story and hung our sins on the cross. Amen.