

## How to Deal With Temptation

A sermon by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, on the first Sunday in Lent, March 4, 1990. Scripture Lessons: Genesis 2:4b-9, 15-17, 25-3:7; Psalm 130; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11.

**In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

What does it mean to be a child of God, to know that God loves you, to know that God is well pleased with you and that God has chosen you to carry out his purpose here on earth?

You say, "It would be great to believe that but you don't know me the way that I know me. If you did you'd know that God isn't pleased with me."

But have you ever noticed what I say whenever I baptize a baby or an adult? "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." What does that mean? It means that when God looks at us, he sees us through the eyes of Christ. When God looks at us he sees us surrounded by Christ. And then I take the children in my arms and say, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that may declare the wonderful deeds of God, who called you out of darkness into God's marvelous light."

You say, "What right have you to say something like that to these children or to an adult?"

It's the Word of God. That's what God says about all those for whom Christ has died.

The greatest temptation that you and I face as Christians has nothing to do with sex, with drugs, with alcohol or with money but with our relationship with God. The greatest temptation that you and I face as Christians is the temptation to deny, to doubt, to discount that God loves us, that Christ died for us, that in life or in death we belong to Christ.

That's where the Tempter seems to attack us first. "You're not really a Christian. If you were really a Christian you'd be a super-parent, not the

kind of parent you are. If you're really a child of God why aren't you working miracles? How can you talk about the power of the risen Christ in your life? Where's the power you claim? If you have really died with Christ and risen with him to newness of life, where's the evidence?"

The greatest temptation that a Christian faces is to believe that our relationship to God is based on how good we are, how faithful we are, how religious we are, rather than to believe and trust that our relationship to God is based on what God has already done for us in Christ, through his death and resurrection. The greatest temptation that we have to face is the temptation to think that we are able to make ourselves righteous apart from trusting in what Christ did for us on the cross.

If we know or trust that we're a child of God because of what Christ has done for us we have a sense of dignity... a sense of self-esteem... that strengthens us when we are faced with lesser temptations. It's when we give in to the temptation to deny that we're a child of God that we begin to lie and cheat and steal and commit adultery and covet and worship idols and take the Lord's name in vain, and worship other Gods.

Knowing who we are, in Christ, enables us to be strong in the face of temptation. Kay comes from a highly respected Lewistown family. Lewistown is a small town in central Pennsylvania, in Mifflin County. Kay's family has been involved in law, and business and education and community <sup>church</sup> service for several generations. People know them and respect them. When we go back to Lewistown and go to church the minister will say, "Little Kay Ziegler is visiting us this morning with her husband and children. She's the daughter of Dean and Lois Ziegler." There's a sense of pride and self-esteem being a member of her family. I remember hearing Kay's father say to her brother when he was a teenager going out on a date,

"Remember that you're a Ziegler. You're not some Yahoo, you're a Ziegler." And I think that's said not with any sense of arrogance but with a good sense of pride. "Remember who you are."

And when we remember that God is our Father and Jesus is our brother we have a strength and a dignity that enables us to say, "No!" in the face of temptation. "Remember, you're a child of God! Remember your a member of the family of God."

Our Gospel lesson tells us that Jesus was driven out into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan. Now it's important to understand when this happened. It happens right after the baptism of Jesus. Jesus has just been baptized. The heavens opened. The Holy Spirit descended upon him in the form of a dove. A voice from heaven said to him, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

And it's important to understand *how* Jesus was tempted. He wasn't tempted to get drunk. He wasn't tempted to go to a prostitute. He wasn't tempted to do drugs. The tempter focused on his relationship to God. "If you are the Son of God." Are you really the Son of God? Do you really believe that? If you're really the Son of God prove it. If you're really the Son of God use your powers to satisfy your own needs; turn these stones to bread. If you're really the Son of God, do something spectacular to prove it; jump off the pinnacle of the temple. Worship me and I'll give you the kingdoms of the world and all their glory. "Think of it!" Satan offered the kingdoms of this world to the King of kings and Lord of lords. Ogilvie writes, "The ludicrous thing is that they were his already". The tempter constantly tries to get us to want what we already have in Christ.

Notice also how the tempter comes to us when we're isolated from

others; whenever we become separated from our families. The Tempter came to Eve when she was by herself. The Tempter came to Jesus when he was by himself. It was in the wilderness, cut off from his friends, that the Tempter's power was felt the strongest. It's difficult to face temptation on our own and when we're far away from those who know and love us. That's why Christ calls us into his church, his body, and tells us that we're to bear one another's burdens. We can't deal with temptation very effectively on our own. We need one another. We need close Christian friends with whom we can talk and pray, not just on Sunday, but throughout the week.

Finally, the Serpent came to Adam and Eve and tempted them to eat of the forbidden fruit. The Lord had warned them, "The day that you shall eat of it, you shall surely die." They ate and they died as all of us also die.

Jesus comes to us this morning and invites us to take and eat and live. When you come to receive the bread and the wine this morning, come in faith, believing that Christ died for you and that he has done everything necessary for your salvation.

Let us pray: O Lord, you have sent us out into all the world to make followers from every nation, help us to resist the temptations which you yourself have conquered. Keep us from offering to the hungry nothing but bread; from presenting proofs instead of a Person; and from serving the forces of this world in the hope that they will serve us, your messengers; through the power of your name. Amen.