

“Giving Up Control” - Matthew 4:1-11 – Rev. Jeff Childs

“*Lead us not into temptation,*” with these words Jesus offered us a direction in the Lord’s Prayer. You might think that God would not do that! But if you read the story about Jesus’ temptation closely you will notice that is exactly what the Spirit of God did to Jesus. And I believe that is what God did to Adam and Eve in the garden story. Had God not put the forbidden tree in the garden, we would not have the rest of the story and we would ignorantly still be living in a perfect world.

Today on this first Sunday of Lent I invite you to “Give up Control” by yielding to God’s control and direction. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament begin with stories of temptation though with very different results. In the 3rd chapter in Genesis and the 4th chapter in Matthew we find temptations with very different responses. And in our own personal experiences we all probably have stories of yielding to and resisting temptations also. There were times when like Adam and Eve we have disobeyed God, thinking perhaps that we, like them, knew better than God, with disastrous consequences. They ate from the tree they were not to eat from and were forced out of the garden. While being tempted in the wilderness, Jesus denied his own impulses and followed God's will.

If God will lead you to it, God will lead you through it. Remember that phrase from the Lord’s Prayer, “*Lead us not into temptation,*” ends, “*but deliver us from evil.*” Some want to translate it deliver us from the “evil one” aka Satan. But I wonder if the evil is when we choose anything other than the will of God. The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted, but the Spirit also allowed Jesus the opportunity to be tested and to pass with flying colors. Before the day is out you and I will be tempted and tested somehow. How will we do? Will we fail on our own, or faithfully follow God’s word and God’s way? Did you notice that to each temptation Jesus responded with a quote from the Old Testament (incidentally it was the only Testament they had at the time!) When you are tempted, do you have any scriptures to hold on to? You might repeat, “*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*”

Forty days can change your world. Think about it:

In the time of Noah 40 days of rain flooded the earth. (Genesis 7.12)

Moses fasted on the mountain 40 days and received the 10 commandments. (Exodus 34.28)

Jesus fasted 40 days in the wilderness overcoming 3 temptations. (Matthew 4.2)

Here today 40 days until Easter what might we give up that will change our lives and change our world? Following Jesus’ experience in the wilderness, some Christians try some form of fasting during Lent. For some it is a total fast perhaps one day a week or fasting from or “giving up” one item like candy or desserts. Fish is popular on Fridays during Lent due to customs of some people giving up meat on Fridays and figuring out somehow that fish is not meat. Maybe fish is a vegetable like tomatoes or corn. Wait, they are not vegetables, tomatoes are fruits and corn is a grain. Food is so confusing! I use a simpler plan. Once again this year I will fast during Lent and focus on people who are hungry as I literally feel their pain as this season goes on. Following John Wesley’s example, I will fast on Fridays. Wesley would fast until 3pm the hour Jesus died on the cross on Good Friday. If you are able, I invite you to join me. For those of you who cannot for medical reasons, join us in Spirit and in prayer.

You need faith to give up control. You need faith in God to give God control of your life. BTW we also pray that, “*Thy will be done.*” Today, where we are used to having control over so many things, we often fail to seek God's will for our lives and try to call all the shots ourselves. God wants us to deny ourselves and give God the final say, when we are charting out the course of our

lives. A phrase I have picked up from Celebrate Recovery, a ministry to help people overcome addictions, is, "Let Go and Let God." I take that idea with me when I lead Volunteer in Mission teams. We go to serve God and the people we serve. Many times people want to control what happens on a mission, but it is a God thing, and we need to yield our will to God's will or we will get frustrated when it does not go our way. And so it is with life! During these 40 days, will you do that? Give up control for Lent.

I invite you to try something in prayer. Many churches have prayer teams or prayer groups often calling themselves "prayer warriors." What if we became "prayer servants?" Rather than telling God what we want God to do, I invite you to pray and ask God, "what do you have for me to do today?" And then do it. Rather than pray saying, "God bless what I am doing," pray, "God help me do what you are already blessing!" One of those Old Testament scriptures that might help you was shared by Joshua as he led the people into the holy land. He said to the people, "*Choose today whom you will serve...my family and I will serve the LORD.*" (Joshua 24.15) It's a choice and it is up to you to choose. You can follow your stomach. You can follow your will. Or you can follow the Lord. In these 40 days I will hope we learn to do the latter. And if we can do it for 40 days, we can do it for the rest of our days. Alleluia and Amen.

During Lent this week, use these questions in a "Soul to soul" conversation with people.

What are some of your greatest temptations?

What have you ever tried to "give up" for Lent? What will you "give up" this year?

How hard will it be for you to give up control?

Of what all might you "Let Go and Let God?"

When We Confess Our Sins

Jeffrey B. Childs 3/3/2025

(Tune: Dennis UMH 557)

When we confess our sins,
And temptations resist,
Our journey to Easter begins,
As we journey with Christ.

We let go and let God,
Guide us on the path through.
Discern as on the way we trod,
What we for Christ may do.

What's done in forty days,
Might be a prelude for,
How for Christ we might live always,
Now and forevermore.