

## Say No to Temptation

**Mark 1:9-15**  
**March 16, 2025**

**First Presbyterian Church**  
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In the early part of this century, a novelist researching a book about life in a New England town visited the local cemetery as part of his investigation. Interestingly, nearly every tombstone from that era bore a final epitaph, all of them praising the dearly departed with words like “kind,” “generous,” “upstanding,” “loving” and “faithful.” Seeing this, the writer said to himself, “I wonder where they buried all the sinners?”

We all sin, we all succumb to temptation. And usually, our temptations lead us to overindulge, which leads to ... nothing good. Our sermon time today is about saying no to temptation to make room in our lives – and in our hearts – for what God would have us do, thus, receiving the blessings that come from that.

In our New Testament lesson from Mark, Jesus enters into a time of temptation – not because of weakness – but rather from a place of strength. And yet, Jesus was fully human so the temptation is real! It’s just that Jesus is living into a greater reality.

Have you ever thought of temptation as an opportunity for strength, an opportunity to find an inner strength that leads to greater blessings, more joy and comfort, peace and love. Well it is, and today we’re going to learn how to go from temptation to blessing, through strength-through not our own. The first thing we learn from Mark about Jesus’ time of temptation comes after his baptism by John in the Jordan. “... As he was coming up out of the water,” says Mark, “he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.” And he heard a voice come from heaven, “saying, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

Is that something you’re able to hear from God, about yourself? Do you hear or imagine God saying to you, “You are my child; with you I am well pleased,” fully pleased. Or are there things you can imagine God noticing in your life that he is not pleased with? If you’re honest with yourself – and with God – there are, there are things you do that displease God. We all have such things in our lives, in how we are being.

The first step in overcoming such things, such temptations and shortfalls is to know that God sees past these things, these weakness that have ahold of you. God sees past them; to the fullness of the person he knows you to be. Look at it this way. You love God, right? Well to love God is to be loved by God. When you do something that you know God doesn’t love, imagine what it would be like to do something else, something in keeping with how much God truly loves you and cares for you.

And then in the strength of God’s love for you, step away from that temptation and enter into God’s embrace. He will protect you and care for you.

We see this care and protection in Jesus-wilderness experience. In the wilderness Mark tells us Jesus was with the wild beasts, and the angels waited on him.” The Greek word used for the angels “waiting on” Jesus or “serving” Jesus is the same word they would have used for serving food to someone. The angels brought food to Jesus, because he was fully human – and fully God – and as fully human he suffered hunger just like we do. And still, he was able to overcome Satan’s temptations and survive alongside the wild beasts.

Whether the danger came from an evil force like Satan or from worldly things like hunger and wild beasts, God protected and cared for Jesus, just as he protects and cares for us. We can withstand and overcome any temptation as long as we focus on the love, care and protection of God.

St. Augustine put it this way, saying, “If in Christ we have been tempted, in him we overcome the devil,” meaning those in Christ who struggle with temptation also share in the strength of Christ to overcome that temptation. St. Augustine continues, saying, “Do you think only of Christ’s temptations and fail to think of his victory? See yourself as tempted in him, and see yourself as victorious in him. He could have kept the devil from himself,” says Augustine,” but if he were not tempted, he could not teach you how to triumph over temptation.”

That’s how much God loves you, and how powerful that love is in overcoming any force, any temptation, any danger or despair you may face.

Finally, Mark tells us about what happened after Jesus overcame the power of temptation on our behalf. “... John (the baptizer) was arrested.” John baptized Jesus in the love of God, and Jesus used that love to overcome temptation, and then John was arrested. There is danger in following Jesus. John was arrested and lost his life as a follower of Jesus.

Are you willing to lose your life as a follower of Jesus? Or are you tempted to save it, by giving into Satan’s greatest temptation, the temptation to save your earthly life – your worldly habits and lifestyle – at the expense of losing your heavenly reward by turning your back on the love, care, and protection of God? No, allowing temptation to get in between you and God – even for a single moment – it’s too high a price for too little reward.

Thank God that in Jesus, we have the power and strength to set aside temptation and live into a more powerful and blessed future, a greater reality than whatever the temptation offers you, whatever you get from indulging in something you shouldn’t. I mean after John was arrested, “Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God” – the blessed reality of God – “saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’”

When Jesus says, “The time is fulfilled,” he’s talking about a theology known as the “already, not yet.” In Christ, the victory is already won, even if we do not yet see it.

Just because it's not our experience right now does not make it any less certain, for those of us who are in-the-world-but-not-of-the-world, those who live in the certainty of heaven on earth, Christ's victory over all.

So, when faced with your next moment of temptation, try doing something new instead. Try imagining God saying to you, "You are my child; with you I am well pleased," fully pleased. And then do whatever you imagine would be pleasing to God. Just do it.

And as you struggle to do it, imagine God's love and protection surrounding you, just as it surrounded Jesus in the wilderness, bringing him through times of hunger, devilish temptation, and fierce, beastly dangers.

Look folks, the victory of Christ is certain – none of us doubts that, in the fullness of Christ. And in Christ's victory, we have our victory also, victory over whatever gets in between us and God, victory over whatever that next temptation is for you.

Amen.

## PASTORAL PRAYER

Merciful God, Jesus willingly yielded himself to the deprivation, the temptation and the blessings of 40 days in the wilderness. We experience times of wilderness as well – times of spiritual drought, physical temptation, emotional despair. We feel alone. We feel unworthy and unlovable. Our resolve is tested, and fatigue threatens to overwhelm us. We are harassed by fear and doubt. We are unsure of you and unsure of ourselves.

Empower us, gracious God, to follow the example of Jesus. Remind us of your faithfulness in the wilderness. Feed us with your presence. Grant us insight to recognize your redemptive work in the midst of pain. Renew our hearts and minds that we might receive wilderness moments as a gift, and embrace what you will do there, in us.

Lord, we pray for those we know whose time of need is great. And for all of us, teach us in these 40 days the ways of deeper spiritual growth. Increase our desire to know you and be known by you. Work on us to develop a practice of prayer and repentance, so that we become more firmly rooted in your Word and will, and better able to resist every trick of the Evil One.

We pray this for the sake of Jesus Christ – Jesus, who taught us to pray together, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.**

**Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**