

## *Do not live by bread alone.*

*Psalm 32; Matthew 4: 1-11*

Do you know the joy of forgiveness? Today we hear the words of a person who does know the joy of forgiveness, who through hard work and an open heart is able to reach out to God in full knowledge of who they are and what they have done. The journey of Lent begins right after Jesus was baptized. Jesus then takes time to go off on his own to wander in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights. In this time Jesus prays, Jesus fasts, Jesus ruminates on the scriptures, Jesus discerns what his calling is, and he makes space for God. Though he's gone off on his own he is not alone. On this journey Jesus has not turned from God but turned to God. During his journey in the desert his faith is tested. The adversary or the devil are really putting God to test by testing Jesus. The adversary wanted to know will Jesus be truly faithful to God. Will Jesus be able to resist temptation? Will Jesus who is the word made flesh who walks on the earth in human form be able to resist the desire for power and control? Will Jesus sin?

Sin can be defined in a lot of ways. The way we define it is as the separation from God; those things and actions that keep us from the love of God. Sin is found in all the ways that we do not love God with our whole hearts and do not love our neighbors as ourselves. Maryetta Anshultz in one of the commentaries I was reading this week suggests that temptation comes in the following ways: "Temptation comes when we feel insecure about not having enough. We experience temptation in judgment of others who make choices that we don't understand. Temptation comes when it rules us and makes us able to look away from those in need. Temptation comes and rages when our temper and our addictions define who we are. Temptation wins when we engage in justification of lies, racist jokes, questionable practices in our business and in our life, criticism of those we love. Temptation wins when we get caught up in the trappings of life."<sup>1</sup> If you are sitting here right now and you're starting to feel guilty, don't that is not what lent is about. Lent is the journey to freedom from the control of our fears and our insecurities. It's about experiencing the joy of forgiveness.

In a song of faith the most recent creedal statement of the United Church of Canada we proclaim and believe the following: It says:

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<sup>1</sup> Maryetta Anshultz, *Feasting on the Word; Year A, Volume 2* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 48.

Made in the image of God, we yearn for the fulfillment that is life in God. Yet we choose to turn away from God. We surrender ourselves to sin, a disposition revealed in selfishness, cowardice or apathy. Becoming bound and complacent in a web of false desires and wrong choices, we bring harm to ourselves and others. This brokenness in human family and community is the outcome of sin. Sin is not only personal but accumulates to become habitual and systemic forms of injustice, violence and hatred...<sup>2</sup>

The psalmist provides us today with a very visceral image of what happens when we turn away from God and give into temptation. The psalmist cried out, “While I kept silent my body wasted away through my groaning all day long for day and night your hand was heavy upon me, my strength was dried up as by the heat of the summer.” To put it in another way, it's the feeling of my bones being completely worn out. That deep aching of bones that is a metaphor for the distress of our soul.

Andrea Wigodsky a pastor wrote the following, “so often our failure to acknowledge our sins to God as a result of our failure to acknowledge them to ourselves. This denial may be rooted in shame, defiance or perhaps just plain thoughtlessness.”<sup>3</sup> We need to come clean to God and to ourselves. The words in the Psalm today are words of assurance. When the psalmist stopped trying to cover up their sins God protected them. God provided shelter, a hiding place, a refuge from the rush of a mighty water. Going back to that creedal statement it continues with words of assurance that say:

We sing lament and repentance. Yet evil does not - cannot - undermine or overcome the love of God. God forgives, and calls all of us to confess our fears and failings with honesty and humility. God reconciles and calls us to repent the part we have played in damaging our world, ourselves and each other. God transforms and calls us to protect the vulnerable, to pray for deliverance from evil, to work with God for the healing of the world that all might have abundant life. We sing of Grace.<sup>4</sup>

We need to be reminded of these words of assurance especially as we walk through Lent, we are assured that God forgives, God reconciles, and God transforms because we are loved by God. We are God's chosen people. All we need to do is reach out to God rather than turning away.

Throughout the program year, since September we've been looking at marks of discipleship. We talked about the importance of prayer, reading of scripture, going and attending worship, also serving one another and during Lent we're going to talk about the importance of having spiritual friends. Spiritual friendship is the means by which we as disciples of Jesus live out what Jesus taught. This is the means by which we receive encouragement to face truth, be honest with

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<sup>2</sup> *A Song of Faith: A Statement of Faith of The United Church of Canada*, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Andrea Wigodsky, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 2, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> *A Song of Faith*

ourselves and with one another. Spiritual friendship gives us strength, helps us to stay on track and provides us with that unconditional love that we all need and long for, so that even when we turn away from God someone else is there to sometimes gently nudge us back in the right direction, sometimes to stop as dead in our tracks and give us a swift spiritual kick so that we can receive what is freely offered. The temptations in the gospel reading today are not about us they are about Jesus and in this story we hear that Jesus refuses to be who we want him to be Jesus provides no self advertisement by proving what it was he could do and Jesus does not try to persuade. Jesus is authentic. Jesus follows his call trusting in God trusting in the spiritual friendship all around him.

The psalmist invites us to experience the love of God by hiding in God, not from God. Jesus invites us today to not live by bread alone which is a human need but by every word of God. We are asked to follow, and it is our choice and when we choose to follow, we will experience and know the joy of forgiveness and the love of God. I want to feel that sense of freedom as we walk towards the cross to the resurrection I want all of us to feel that freedom so that we can truly live as we have been called to live and share our gifts in the way that we have been called to share them so that we aren't apart of harming this world and each other trust in God be open with your hearts speak to God and find shelter. Thanks be to God. Amen.