

Lent A1

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“Boot Camp for the Soul: The Need for Change

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**Matthew 4**

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’ But he answered, ‘It is written,*

*‘One does not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”*

*Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,*

*‘He will command his angels concerning you’,  
and ‘On their hands they will bear you up,  
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’ ”*  
*Jesus said to him, ‘Again it is written, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” ’*

*Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; and he said to him, ‘All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Away with you, Satan! for it is written,*

*‘Worship the Lord your God,  
and serve only him.’ ”*  
*Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.*

Today I am beginning a sermon series for Lent, for the next six weeks, with the title “Boot Camp for the Soul.” “Boot camp” brings to mind rigorous work, sweat, and maybe tears, that results in a stronger body, mind, or spirit.

I know some of you attend the boot camp classes at the YMCA. You exercise hard to get a healthier body or stronger muscles or maybe just to fit into your skinny jeans better. High school marching bands have a boot camp at the end of each summer when they practice all week in order to get their half time performance in shape. There’s a boot camp in Colorado for teenage boys who are struggling to grow up in a healthy way. And there’s the boot camp run by the Culinary Institute of America where you learn to “bake crusty artisan breads and plate dazzling desserts!” And next week the heavy metal band *Megadeth* is hosting a boot camp to teach guitar and drums to their fans, and to hold a little church service together.

Our boot camp here on the next few Sundays will challenge us to do the hard work to get our spiritual lives in order. And we start today with the reality of temptation.

1.

I come to a stoplight and I wait for the red light to become green. And when it does the guy coming the other way cuts in front of me to make his turn, daring me to hit him, and knowing I won’t. I’m tempted to blow the horn, give him a piece of my mind, or show him some disrespect. I am tempted....what does that mean?

I make enough money to pay my taxes but when April comes around I have to urge myself to be honest and lawful. I am required to disclose all of my income, including earnings from weddings

and funerals and any monetary gifts I've received. I'm pretty sure everyone doesn't do this and I'm tempted to forget about it, let it slide. I am tempted...what does it mean?

I think we believe we know what temptation is – those times when we consider lying or cheating or stealing or do something else we believe we shouldn't. Temptation is a personal thing that I need to resist for my own good.

Right after he was baptized Jesus was tempted, the Bible says. The HS sent him into the wilderness and he was tempted three times. First he was tempted to put himself first, to satisfy his own hunger, his own needs, by turning stones into bread. Second, he was tempted to demand that God do what he wanted, when he wanted it, and how he wanted it done by jumping off the pinnacle of the temple and seeing if God would protect him right then and there. It would be like saying, "If you love me prove it." And third, Jesus was tempted to take a shortcut to power by not doing what he was baptized to do- thereby avoiding the suffering that his ministry would certainly bring him.

2.

Funny, the temptations the Bible wants us to consider are not about lying, cheating, or stealing. The Bible says we are tempted, like Jesus, to deny our baptism, our being chosen by God to be loved and to be sent out to represent God's ways in the world.

Of course we reject lying and cheating and stealing. But the anointing of baptism pushes us into the wilderness where we are tempted to forget who we are and whose we are.

- We can be tempted to forget our calling to minister on behalf of Jesus Christ,
- tempted to forget how to live in our community and our world in ways that bring the good news and hope of the kingdom of God,
- tempted to avoid putting others before us and tempted to avoid the suffering that may come with being disciples who stand up for what God expects to be done.

Let's widen the view a little bit, enlarge the scope of our definition of what it means to be tempted. There is a powerful temptation at work right now to reject people for all sorts of reasons

- maybe because they are from the other side of the border and we must be afraid of them and keep them away.
- Or because of their race or ethnic background is different.
- Or because they are not Christian, so we stop them at the border or harass and attack them if they are already here,
- Or because their gender or physical disabilities or poverty or education level or technical skills don't meet some official guideline.

There is a temptation in our nation, and in many nations right now, to reject people for all sorts of reasons.

3.

But we are baptized into the kingdom of God, a kingdom that is not afraid, that does not seek to serve itself first, that trusts God to do what is right in God's own ways. And we as God's beloved, emerge from the waters of our baptism to find ways

- to welcome others into community,
- to stand up to those who tempt us to deny our calling,
- our baptism pushes us to participate in the new world that is breaking into this old, broken down world of hate and fear and smug self-satisfaction.

In a moment we will gather around the communion table where Jesus promises to meet us. Here we are witnesses to the One who did not serve himself, who said to God, "your will not mine," and who did not cut corners but did the hard work to testify to the kingdom that is coming and for which he suffered. He was tempted to deny his baptism and did not.

We too are tempted, and unlike Jesus we will sometimes forget who we are and whose we are. But at this table we can remember that we are baptized, that we are forgiven, that we are God's beloved, and we can go out and try again. In our community there are Jews and Muslims and refugees and immigrants, documented and not documented, and people of color and folks from many backgrounds. There are people made in God's image who are transgender or poor or unskilled or physically disabled. We have the opportunity to stand with them and for them.

We have a chance to reject temptation and instead live out our baptism.

Come to the table. Remember who you are and be nourished by Jesus Christ who claims you and sends you to represent his kingdom.