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Alexandria, VA 22310
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Genesis 2:15–17; 3: 1–7
Matthew 4:1–11

JUMPED BY SATAN

What do you hear when I read a Genesis passage like this? The story of the fall. What do you feel when you hear Adam and Eve misquoting what God said? What do you feel when you see the willful disobedience of even those who are in paradise? In this passage there's an image of betrayal of our lives. And, despite the abundance of our lives, despite the opportunities we have for peace, here's what we do also. In many ways it's what it means to be human.

Remember the comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes*? Did you know that this little six-year-old boy was actually named after John Calvin, and that much of the story is tied in with reformed understanding of scripture and theology? In the first strip that comes out, Calvin comes out and runs to his dad. He's got on a safari hat and his dad is washing the car, and Calvin says "I'm going to check my tiger trap. I rigged a tuna fish sandwich yesterday and there's nothing a tiger won't do for tuna fish." The father says, "They really like a tuna fish sandwich, huh?" And Calvin says, "More than anything in the world." He heads off, and in the last frame there's Hobbes, hanging upside down from the tree, eating a tuna fish sandwich and the words say, "We're really stupid like that, aren't we?" And hence the series began and ran for over ten years.

Created to be other than stupid. Created to be at peace and enjoy paradise. Given a purpose: to tend the garden. Endowed with abilities, shown what to do, how to do what God wants, and our problem is we're dependent on God. The rub for us is that we're not complete or secure unless we are in relationship with God. We stumble because we're insufficient, incomplete, and most of all, impure. Our struggle in life is that we can't be whole by ourselves. We need God in our lives.

Now this is either foolishness and disturbing to you or it is wonderful gospel—good news. When we come to the story of Jesus being tempted, we see how Satan operates—how Adam and Eve could be so easily duped. It's as if Jesus is jumped or mugged by Satan when he's at his most vulnerable moment—it's says when he's famished. And just as we see ourselves in the garden beside Adam and Eve, we see ourselves in the wilderness with Jesus. But would our choices be his choices? The tempter is a master of insinuation. "You might be the son of God, and IF you are, then turn these stones to bread." Don't we entertain those kinds of insinuations, even within the body of Christ—doubts about who we really are as a people of God? You might be a disciple of Jesus IF you do so and so. Wouldn't it be great if God would take away all our doubts and insecurities—all our worries about whether we are in or we are out.

These two stories are descriptions of how evil can take over our lives. And it all begins with just entertaining that seed of doubt about whether or not God can be trusted. It's important as Christians for us to recognize Satan when we hear his voice. He works with a little word like 'if' with such mastery. He maximizes its impact in our lives. "IF"—and we begin to worry. God has promised to supply everything that we need. God has promised to fulfill our longings, to take our lives and give them meaning and to perfect Christ's love in our midst—the incarnate love of the Savior of the world. And all Satan has to do to mug us is suggest that maybe God won't come through this time. Maybe there's something besides God that will fit that void in our hearts.

Great theologians through the centuries have described this dynamic in various ways. Augustine says, "We have a human restlessness that can only find rest in God." Nothing else will satisfy. Nothing else is sufficient—not the most advanced offering from the electronics industry, not the newest design in running shoes. None of that will give our lives ultimate meaning.

And so this year, this Lent, we are asked, "Are you willing to confront the tempter which has taken up residence within your faith, who is crafty beyond any other creature, who will catch you unaware if you are not alert?" Like a thief. Jesus says, "Let us find our rest not in serving ourselves, but in seeing Christ in one another." Let us be inspired not by fear, but by the love that God makes so abundantly available—that love that knits God's word to our hearts. Let us seek something other than the shiniest, newest toy in our world. Let us seek wisdom rather than possession. And, let us be a people who are known by the inner peace that we share rather than a people who are anxious about so many things when only one is necessary.

God will satisfy that longing we have for security, but only if we are willing to look for goodness in our brothers and sisters in Christ. God will satisfy our restlessness if we claim again that we are baptized in one family. Martin Luther was known for exclaiming at the most inopportune times that he was a baptized child of God. And come to find out every time Luther was tempted, he would simply say out loud, "I am a baptized child of God." As if to say, "Satan, enough with you, I'm done with you."

Do we believe we are a beloved child of God? Forgiven? Redeemed? Renewed? Do we believe that we've been called into a whole different experience of life where light overcomes darkness, where confidence overcomes fear, and we can face the tempter without being afraid because we are a baptized child in God's family.

I believe it is so with us often. And so may it be through all of this year and this season. Amen.