

Pastor Roy's sermon from March 10, 2019

The three temptations of Christ at the end of his 40 day fast remind him to:

Be ok with hunger. From stones to bread--not every desire needs to be fulfilled.

Resist seeking political power over others, but live in the power of love and God's mercy.

Refuse to make demands of God or to force your rules and agenda on God. It's also helpful to avoid cheering crowds and any demands for miracles. If miracles come, they are a gift but not to be expected. Faith is not a miracle delivery system. Faith is not about seeking excitement or a rush. It is about humility in compassionate love.

Welcome to Lent!

Lent, the season in which we confess to ourselves and others our weakness, our fragile vulnerability, our total lack of control of the things we so desperately want to control. In Lent we are reminded that we depend on God. We are also reminded that we depend on each other.

This is why fasting of anything is encouraged during Lent. Because fasting is a dreadful experience. It makes us cranky, it reveals our true priorities. It begins to strip from us our unhealthy dependence on everything but God. Fasting convinces us that we definitely need help.

And the beauty of fasting is that even if we set out to give up something and fail, or if we are too afraid of failure to even try, we win, because we are humbled. We are reminded that of our dire need.

Fasting or not fasting reminds us that we are not as strong as we wish, or in our wildest dreams imagine ourselves to be. We are dust, dry bones waiting for the life-giving embrace of God. **Fasting makes all of this crystal clear.** The worse the experience, the more you fail, the better it is. Fasting is almost like spiritual magic. It's a fast track to humility.

Regardless of fasting, life's challenges, stretches, and disappointments come to us. Pain, disappointment, addiction—these point us in the general direction of God. If we listen and seek help, the trouble in our lives will

strengthen our faith. The gift of God's grace shown in Jesus Christ becomes stronger as we confess more fully our weakness, our sin, our idolatry. So every time we run into trouble in our lives, it is an opportunity to look to God for help. To seek true goodness, true love, true mercy. As Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." But the road to freedom is a dark, painful road. The sooner we embrace that road, that journey in faith, the sooner we will find freedom.

This is true for us as individuals, but also as congregations. All that Mt Zion is and does is the gift of God's grace. In the challenging times in which the whole church finds itself today, we do well to seize the opportunity to be humbled and open ourselves to receive what God has for us.

The love of Christ invites us to let go and find the space to celebrate the fellowship, the friendship, the goodness of God which is reflected in this congregation. You are the vessel of God's mercy and love in this community. You have opportunities and gifts which you must continue to cultivate together and offer up to God. This is God's work. We are partners with God.

Remembering the temptation of Jesus Christ in the wilderness, as the body of Christ: ***We learn to embrace our hunger. We resist seeking political power over others. We acknowledge and release our demands of God.***

I will close with a prayer for you by Thomas Merton,

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

[Amen.] Thomas Merton