

## “First Fruits”

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill  
Sunday March 10, 2019

Deut. 26. 1-11

The other scripture reading appointed for today is Jesus’ temptations in the desert. And I have to say, I don’t think the devil is very original.

The temptations Jesus faced seem like variations on a theme... now admittedly it is a good theme... and one we see to fall for pretty often, but the temptation goes back all the way to garden of Eden.

Do you remember it – the serpent came to the woman and said, if you eat the fruit that God told you not to eat, you will ..... (become like God).

And that seems to be our great temptation... we want to be like God – we want to stop being God’s creation – and instead we want to be as God – take God’s place.

We want to control things – we want to do it our own way – we want to be wise in our own eyes – we want to make the plans and carry them out. Independent, self-sufficient, self-supporting, setting our own agenda, our own time-line, and putting it all into action on our own terms...

We want to be like God...

We want the credit, the control, and the congratulations.

Out in the wilderness, the tempter came to Jesus and invited him to set God’s plans aside and perform miracles at his own determining, to seize the power of the world, and to put God to the test...

The devil didn’t try to get Jesus to do anything wrong – bread is good – it feeds hungry people, including Jesus.

Having power is good and in fact Jesus now is over every kingdom and power and authority.

And throwing himself off a cliff to be saved by angels would certainly be a spectacular show that would surely win many people to Jesus and his cause – a sign of power and wonder.

But all these things would be Jesus putting himself in the place of God the Father – the Son was to learn obedience- Jesus was not calling the shots – his Father was.

Jesus' life was a response to the leading of God – following God's mission –

In the passage from Deuteronomy, we have the people of Israel learning to not fall into temptation.

Their story was one of God's deliverance – God rescued them from slavery, God brought them to a good land, God drove out their enemies....

And so each year the people came, family by family to proclaim all that God had done for them.

They were not God, it was not by their own might, or their good planning, or their frugal ways, or their own wisdom and schemes, or work that they had what they had.

What they had was a gift from God.

And so first they came, first they gave thanks, first they acknowledged God who had led them, God who was with them, and God who had blessed them.

In the game of basketball, there is a 24 second rule – once the team gets possession of the ball they have 24 sec to shoot for a basket.

You can't just dribble and pass the ball all game – you have to go for the score – or there is a penalty and the ball is turned over to the opposing team.

Maybe churches should have a 24 sec rule in our conversations – we have 24 sec to get to the point of praising or thanking God – or mentioning what God has done- in our after church conversations over coffee, or even in our conversations outside the church.

Praising and enjoying God, glorifying God is our goal.

And so first and foremost this morning we are here to thank and praise God – to give God the glory and the thanks and the praise!

We acknowledge the Lord as our God – our provider- our Saviour and Lord of the Church.

God has been with us.

Many of you have been reading Heart speaks to Heart, and Henri Nouwen's first prayer. He begins with the scripture of "*Come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke and learn from me...*"

The invitation is to be yoked to Jesus- to go through our whole days yoked to him, to learn to do our work, our family life, our friends with him, to know our joys and sorrows, success and failures yoked- sharing all things with him.

Nouwen reminds us that "for anyone who wants to come to Jesus, there is room. Jesus wants to draw all people to himself and offer them a home where every human desire is met, every human longing comes to rest and every human need is satisfied." (p. 22)

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit have walked with us in these last days and weeks and years.

This church is built on the faithfulness of God.

Everything about this church building, reminds us of what God has done in our midst. Our Annual meeting, our Year in Review document, are not first about us, but about God.

God has said; "Come to me" and we have come and we have been changed, and we have been grown as disciples, and we have been sent out to serve God's mission in the world.

And we have come back here rejoicing in all that God has done, in all God's faithfulness, and all the people who are finding there is room for them, and there is a home where they are welcome.

And when the people came before God, they brought with them the first fruits of all they had received from God.

Jesus gave his first, and his whole to God the Father.  
We are invited to do the same.

We are invited to bring a gift – money- our possessions- the first of everything- our tithe 10% and more- because all belongs to God.

*Needing a new church treasurer, the Session asked the local grain elevator manager to take the position. He agreed under two conditions: no treasurer's report would be given during the first year and no questions would be asked. The Elders thought this odd, but he was a trusted member of the church and being a farming community, they all did business with him, so they agreed. At the end of the year the treasurer gave his report: "The church's debt of \$228,000 was paid off. The minister's salary increased by 8%. Presbyterians Sharing received 200% of what they'd pledged. There were no outstanding bills. And there was a cash balance of \$11,800. The shocked congregation asked, "How did you do it? Where did the money come from?" He quietly answered: "Throughout the year when you brought your grain to my elevator, I simple withheld ten percent on your behalf and gave it to the church in your name!"*

The purpose of tithing is to teach us to always put God first in our lives.  
Jesus gave us everything- this season of Lent we journey with Jesus towards the cross.

We give from the first, from the best of our lives.  
We learn to be living sacrifices- returning all we have back to God.  
In love and praise and devotion, we learn to free ourselves from fear and greed, and give as God has given to us.

We are God's people. We are not God.  
And we are learning to be like Jesus, to give in love, to give with open hands and open hearts, from all that we have received, with thankfulness.

Thanks be to God.