

Bread and Apples
1st Sunday of Lent
March 1, 2020
Trinity Bixby
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[Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7](#) (VOICE)
[Matthew 4:1-11](#) (CEB)

When does bread taste best? Is it... when you sneak pieces of dough even before it's baked? Or fresh out of the oven, still piping hot and smelling of freshness? Maybe it's best when it's sliced up and served, with toppings of butter or jam. What about after toasting? Or dipping in eggs and cinnamon and sugar? Some of you might think bread is best when cut into strips and formed into a toast house. Others might think the whole bread thing is overrated, and prefer a nice rice cake, or gluten-free tortilla. Bread is a whole lot of things to a whole lot of people, and in the West, made up most of the diet of populations since its first creation at the beginning of the bronze age. Indeed, in Hebrew, the word for "food" is literally the word "bread" – you can't eat without having "bread"! (That word, by the way, is *lechem* – as in *beit lechem*, where Jesus, the Bread of the World was born in the aptly named House of Bread.)

Anyone hungry after all this talk of bread? Imagine how hungry you'll be after 40 minutes of this sermon! No? What about 4 hours of driving, with no where to eat along the way? Or 40 hours after a disaster, trying to survive on what you can find until assistance can reach you. We talk about 40 days in the wilderness like it's no big deal, but if we know *anything* about Jesus' testing there, we know that he was HUNGRY. At the very end of this trying time, Jesus faces the great Adversary, who tries to get him to turn stones into bread. Jesus hears a voice in the wilderness, but it is not the still small voice he probably expected, nor the voice that cried out at his baptism 40 days earlier. Instead, it is a voice that Matthew renders this way: "*Eipe hina hoi lithoi houtoi artoi genontai*" Speak, that the stones – these ones – bread might become." The temptation is that Jesus would take matters into his own

hands, fulfilling his own needs without following God's plan. Jesus' reply, taken from Deuteronomy, is that "One does not simply live by eating bread, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."

So, hunger, even extreme hunger, doesn't work. Next up is the temptation of glory and uncertainty – and the tempter quotes scripture back at Jesus. "If you are the Son of God, then throw yourself down, for it is written..." First of all, "If" you are the Son of God? Not 40 days ago, God's voice came directly from the heavens opening, and said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I find joy." Next, apparently Satan is trying to get Jesus to *make* scripture be fulfilled, instead of *trusting* in its truth. Whenever I hear of false prophets trying to manufacture miracles, I always come back to this passage, and Jesus' response: "Do not test God" – instead, we should trust that God is there and will uphold us in God's own way.

Lastly, Evil McEvilface tries to get Jesus to skip the hard path before him, and jump right to the ending. "Things turn out alright at the end – all you have to do is worship me, and you skip ahead to page 216, the end of the story!" Jesus again responds with the equivalent of, "Nope! Not today, Satan. Not any day. I know my times tables. We must worship and serve only God."

Cool. Jesus knows his scripture, knows the heart of the matter, and rejects the temptation in the wilderness. But are the things Satan asks Jesus to do terrible in themselves? Well, Jesus creates tasty, delicious bread in the feeding of the 5000 – not necessarily from stone, but in that story, he's feeding other people, not himself. The miracle isn't self-serving.

Next, immediately following this temptation story, we're told that angels of God appear to Jesus and "serve him" – *diakonos*, the root of our concept of "deacon." But they appear in God's own time, not because Jesus forces his circumstances to match a scriptural mold. And lastly, of course, after the crucifixion, Jesus' resurrection places him in Heaven, given all authority in heaven and on earth. The temptation lay in trying to take things before their time.

I wonder: when have you found your connection with God to be a strength in the midst of difficulty?

I'm reminded of a story from one of my favorite authors in childhood, Beverly Cleary. In the book *Beezus & Ramona*, a very curious and forthright girl named Ramona decides that the best bite of an apple is always the first one. So she sneaks into the cellar one day, and takes a bite of all of the apples stored there. Just one bite, from dozens of apples. She wanted only the sweetest bite of each apple – why wait and delay the joy? And her older sister and parents know that if they make a big deal out of this, they'll have to deal with it again and again. Instead of remarking on the single-bite apples, they simply change their plans, and make applesauce. They're still feeding the family, and doing so in a way that removed the temptation to bite all the apples – and they get to have a great conversation about the importance of sharing and taking joy in others' joy.

I wonder: when have your plans had to change because of unexpected missteps?

Of course, eating apples brings us to the scripture from Genesis, the story of eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of Good and Evil. Traditionally, this story is interpreted to tell us that Adam and Eve disobeyed God out of pride, a desire to be self-sufficient, uninhibited, and have the power of control over their own life, at the price of disobeying God. Y'know, the exact opposite of what Jesus demonstrates in his temptation story. In taking on the knowledge of Good and Evil, the first humans disobey God and cast doubts on God's sovereignty. When we judge each other's "good" or "evil" nature, we cause pain and suffering – instead of acting in the way that God has told us, with mercy or kindness to all, we seek to bite the fruit again and list requirements to be met before we'll offer help. By the same token, when we judge ourselves good or evil, we cut ourselves off from a community of people who would care for us and love us in the same way that God does. No wonder Calvin said that we must act as though everyone else was chosen for heaven, but to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling."

Even if Eve and Adam leaving the garden weren't part of the original plan, God still loves them and offers them ways to clothe and shelter themselves. God's made applesauce from the twice-bitten fruit! We can be comforted that when we

fall, when we fail, God loves us still. When we're as hungry as we've ever been, God will provide. When we put ourselves in God's care, when we act like Jesus does, and recognize our dependence on God, we can be secure in who we are – and whose we are. David Lose, former president of Luther Seminary, put it this way: “Jesus will be content to be hungry as others are hungry, dependent on God's Word and grace for all good things. He will be at risk and vulnerable as are all others, finding safety in the promises of God. And he will refuse to define himself or seek power apart from his relationship with God, giving his worship and allegiance only to the Lord God who created and sustains him.”¹

I wonder: How can you follow Jesus in defining yourself in relationship with God?

May you find yourself not through isolation, but through relationships with God, your family, and your friends – and even those God is calling you to love more dearly. May Jesus guide you in finding the Bread of Life that you can share with everyone you meet. And may the Holy Spirit help you make applesauce of whatever mistakes you've made along the way. Amen.

¹ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=902