



## SERMONS THAT WORK

### Lent 1 (C)

#### Trust and See

[RCL] Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Romans 10:8b-13; Luke 4:1-13

“The only way to get rid of a temptation” Lord Henry advises Dorian Grey in Oscar Wilde’s novel, “is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself.”

We, like Lord Henry, have the sense that when a desire rises within us, we have to *immediately* obey the whims of our passions; that if we don’t, we will be tremendously unhappy, unproductive, unstable. This is the case with all of the passions: Hunger, anger, lust, greed, the desire to impress others, the desire to buy something new. It’s just too distracting not to appease the temptation, and so we give in, even if only to get rid of the longing. But the church has given us an incredible remedy for this ailment: The season of Lent.

Lent is a season marked by three activities: Prayer, fasting, and the giving of alms. In Lent, we don’t just pick a single category — we do all three. This Lent, you might begin each day by saying Morning Prayer from the Book of Common Prayer or the Forward Movement app, you might spend your meals fasting from meat, dairy, and alcohol, and stuff your pockets with cash, giving to all who ask of you throughout these 40 days.

All of this *sounds* relatively doable, but in practice, it’s challenging. What’s more, it’s all pointless unless we also attempt to fast from sin: Fast from giving ourselves over to anger, to greed, to lust; to any of the passions which so often control our actions. Lent is the season in which we utterly reject Lord Henry and look to an altogether different Lord instead.

In today’s Gospel, we see Jesus in the desert. He has fasted from all food for 40 days, and we are told that he was *famished!* Jesus, in his human nature, is weak with hunger and exhaustion when the enemy comes to him saying, “You’re hungry, you *have* to eat. It’s all very well to be highly spiritual, to be contemplative, to be a good person, but when it comes down to it, survival is more important. You’ve got to take care of number one first. Much better to dispense with all of this fasting, have a good meal, and come back to prayer when you’re refreshed and can really focus on it.”

From this perspective, loving God and neighbor are like hobbies; it’s great to indulge in these after you take care of the important things in life, but ultimately, they come last. Be a Christian, but only after you

take care of your work obligations, your family obligations, answer all the emails, fold all the laundry, and *then* see if you have a little time left for God.

But Jesus looks the enemy in the face and says, “No.” One does *not* live by bread alone. We, in the season of Lent, join our fast with that of Christ so that we can also say no to the enemy.

Your passions may sometimes tell you that you just have to get angry in this moment. You have to respond to the insult, you have to shout down the crazy political ideology, you have to fight fire with fire, to give hate for hate, but in Christ, you have the freedom to say, “No. I may feel angry, but I will respond in love.”

The enemy may tell you that you have to hoard your wealth, to pile up money to keep yourself safe. He may whisper in your ear, “If you help one person, you’ll have to help others, and pretty soon you’ll have nothing left for yourself,” but in Christ, you have the power to say no and simply give to all who ask of you.

The voice of Lord Henry may say that only pornography, only the giant meal, only the new sweater, only proving to others that you are successful, smart, and attractive will make you feel ok, will make your life livable, will bring true and lasting happiness, but in the Lord Jesus Christ, we find the strength to say no, turn away from our passions, and turn toward God.

In Lent, we want a little treat. We can’t stop thinking about the brownie, the drink, the luxury item that an internet ad dangles before us. It seems like we will go *crazy* or die if we can’t have it, but we stop ourselves, trust God, and wait to see what happens.

In Lent, we hear the odious comment, the crack-pot idea, the insult and we feel like we will explode if we don’t address it, like we will be permitting inexcusable injustice if we don’t fight back, if we don’t give release to our anger, but we don’t; instead, we forgive, we trust God, and see what happens.

In Lent, we get hungry, we get hangry, we meet our friends at a restaurant, see everyone ordering beautiful steaks and glasses of wine, and we are kicking ourselves that we even agreed to come. We are enraged that the only thing we can eat is a \$30 salad! It feels like the world will come to an end if we don’t just give in and do what everyone else is doing, but we don’t; we trust God and we see what happens.

And at the end of our lives, we face death, and the world will be either trying to hide our death from us, telling us that everything is really fine, or will be sobbing for us, telling us that we have now lost everything. Rather than joining in the lament, we simply trust God, give ourselves to God in life and in death, and we see what happens.

For “One does *not* live by bread alone,” continues the passage from Deuteronomy which Jesus quotes, “but by every word which comes forth from the mouth of God.” We are fed by the Word of God, we live

through the Word of God, and it is the living Word, Jesus, who is *all* that we need. When we worship not food, not wealth and power, not the devil and not ourselves, but God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – we have life and have it abundantly.

This Lent, accept the challenge of prayer, almsgiving, and fasting. Trust God and see what happens.

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