

## ***Sermon***

### ***Lead Us Not into Temptation***

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Our first scripture reading today from Genesis comes very early in the story of creation—so early that even people who have never opened a Bible know something about it. The temptation in the Garden. The serpent. The “forbidden fruit.” Eve reaching, tasting, sharing.

But beneath the familiarity sits a deeper question: **Why do we humans become so fixated on the one thing we’re told we cannot have?** With all the goodness and abundance surrounding them, how did the serpent so easily turn Eve’s attention toward the one tree God had set aside?

And then we turn to our Gospel reading. Jesus, too, is in a place of temptation. The Devil tries to persuade him to use his divine power for self-gain, to take shortcuts, to abandon trust in God for the sake of control.

In Genesis, the serpent succeeds. In the wilderness, the Devil fails.

It's tempting—no pun intended—to read these side by side and conclude: *Be like Jesus, not like Adam and Eve*. But the story is more layered than that.

When Adam and Eve eat the fruit, the consequence doesn't seem that dramatic at first. They realize they're naked—and honestly, I'm grateful for the invention of clothing. I love you all dearly, but I'm not sure we're ready for a clothing-optional worship service!

But of course, it wasn't about nakedness. It was about **lost innocence**. It was about **shame**, not of their bodies, but of their choices. It was about **trust**—or rather, the loss of it.

The serpent didn't convince Eve to eat an apple. The serpent convinced Eve **not to trust God**. To believe that God's boundaries were optional. That God's word was negotiable. That she could choose her own way and God either wouldn't notice or wouldn't mind.

That's the heart of disobedience—not rebellion, but mistrust.

And that word—**disobedience**—is uncomfortable, isn't it? We don't often think of our choices that way. But when we ignore what we know God is calling us toward, when we choose the easier path, the safer path, the path that demands the least change... isn't that what's happening?

Jesus knew the wilderness well. And like him, we rarely walk into the wilderness alone. Temptation meets us there—temptation to take the shortcut, to follow the cultural norm, to avoid conflict, to cling to comfort, to choose the path of least resistance.

But is that who we are created to be? Safe, easy, low-risk disciples?

Change is hard in our personal lives. It's even harder in community, especially when it arrives uninvited. But the real question is always this: **Who is asking for this change?** Is it my preference—or God's call? Have I prayed deeply enough to know the difference? Have I released my desires long enough to hear God's?

Because choosing God changes us. It changes how we respond. It changes how we treat one another. It changes what we value and what we release.

We are not here for the easy ride. Jesus never promised that. He told us plainly that wilderness, danger, and temptation would come—even within the Kingdom. But he also showed us that temptation never leads to the beauty of life with God. It never leads to community, generosity, or love. It leads only to isolation, fear, and scarcity.

And scarcity is the serpent's favorite lie. Hoarding is the serpent's favorite strategy. Fear is the serpent's favorite language.

Serpents are everywhere—sometimes in our own minds, sometimes in the media we consume, sometimes in the voices around us. And like Eve, we can be persuaded not by the fruit itself, but by the story we’re told about it.

I’m going to re-read part of the passage from Genesis – listen and observe how it lays upon you in the context of our own lives and community:

#### **Genesis 2:15-17**

**<sup>15</sup> The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. <sup>16</sup> And the Lord God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, <sup>17</sup> but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”**

**3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” <sup>2</sup> The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup> but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” <sup>4</sup> But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die, <sup>5</sup> for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,<sup>[a]</sup> knowing good and evil.” <sup>6</sup> So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. <sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.**

When we read Genesis again, we see it clearly: **The tree never changed.** Only Eve's perception changed. Words changed her vision. Words changed her desire. Words changed her trust.

And words still do that today.

But when we resist—when we stay rooted in God's voice rather than the serpent's—we begin to see clearly again. All the noise, all the fear, all the pressure, all the cultural expectations—they're like layers of curtains in front of our eyes. We can still see, but everything is distorted.

Remove them, and suddenly we see one another as God sees us. We see truth. We see love. We see our neighbor not as a threat, but as a sibling. We see ourselves not as isolated individuals, but as beloved children of God.

Jesus shows us what it looks like to trust God fully—to lean into that inner divine voice that reminds us who we are and why we're here: to love, to protect the vulnerable, to serve one another, to be generous, to be kind.

So the question before us today is not, "Will we be tempted?" We will. The question is, **whose voice will we trust?** The serpent's voice of fear, scarcity, and self-protection? Or God's voice of abundance, courage, and love?

Jesus shows us that temptation is not defeated by strength, but by trust. Not by willpower, but by grounding. Not by perfection, but by remembering who we belong to and what is expected of us. We are a chosen people- not by our own merit, but by God. We were born with all the strength we would need to remain true to our faith in this life. We have been gifted a community of faith to belong to and have had the desire to be a part of it.

May we be a people who choose trust over fear, obedience over convenience, courage over comfort, and community over isolation. May we walk into the wilderness with Jesus, not to avoid temptation, but to learn how to see clearly again.

And when the serpents whisper—and they will—may we hear another voice, deeper and truer, calling us back to the One who formed us, loves us, and leads us still and the truth that is in all of us – nothing is more powerful than love.

Amen.