

**Sunday, February 14, 2016**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

**Sermon – “Whose Voice Is That?”**

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Over the course of history different eras are given names.

We have the Victorian era, the Puritan era, the roaring twenties, the Age of Aquarius.

I am afraid that future historians and anthropologists will give our time the designation as the ‘self-centered’ age.

We are living in a culture that prioritizes selfish wellbeing over almost everything else, especially over communal wellbeing.

Last Sunday I watched Super Bowl 50, along with almost 115 million other people.

I am not a particularly big football fan, but I do watch a bit each year and have seen many super bowls in the past.

I was intrigued by the player’s self-promotion.

Each time a player, almost without exception, made a successful tackle, catch, kick or play, rather than congratulate his teammates he would engage in an individual celebratory dance as if he had accomplished everything himself.

At the end of the game with 11 seconds left to play, winning quarterback Peyton Manning was surrounded by dozens of cameras and microphones.

There was no opportunity for him to shake the hand of the opposing quarterback or congratulate his own team – most of who were on the field taking selfies!

Selfies; self-help; do-it-yourself...

Our common cultural dialogue has deteriorated into

“I want; I need; I have decided; and I can do it myself.”

We have lost sight of the other in our midst.

We have retreated into a closed world where we only acknowledge or listen to people who agree with us or who serve a purpose that advances our own standing.

We seem to have forgotten that we are interconnected – each only a part of a whole.

This morning we find ourselves with Jesus in the desert.

He has gone off on his own to discern his call to ministry.

He has been baptized and heard the voice of God declare him beloved.

He has yet to recruit disciples.

One author astutely points out that Jesus was likely alone in the desert and the voice that tempted him was his own internal dialogue.

Isn't that really where temptation most often resides?

We listen to the outside voices telling us that we can be better, more powerful, richer, and more successful, but it is the inner voices that drive us to act.

Satan is the name that we give to that inner voice.

It is the part of us that accepts the cultural criticism and generates insecurity.

In today's reading that inner voice attempts to make Jesus anxious about who and whose he is.

The invitation to anxiety is couched in the come-on, "If you are the Son of God . . ."

I am unnerved by Satan quoting psalms.

I don't like the idea of temptation disguised as protection, nourishment or safety.

I want to see the distinction between good and evil.

I want to be certain that I am making conscious choices about resisting temptation.

Temptation is a complicated issue.

It is not so easy to define.

Sometimes we find ourselves in situations where we don't belong.

Sometimes we are lured into conversations that we ought not be in.

Sometimes we find ourselves doing something that we would rather not do.

Fred Craddock makes this point "Real temptation is an offer not to fall but to rise. The tempter in Eden did not ask, "Do you wish to be as the devil?" but "Do You wish to be as God?" There is nothing here of debauchery; no self-respecting devil would approach a person with offers of personal, domestic, or social ruin. That is in the small print at the bottom of the temptation."

Now some of you may say that you are not sinners.

You are able to resist all temptations that come your way.

You have never had an ill thought about another person.

You have never wished that your life were different than it is.

You have perhaps never questioned your faith.

You are a good person.

You don't need God's forgiveness.

You didn't need Christ to die on the cross for you.

I would say that you are wrong.

Every single one of us is human.

We are each subject to the brokenness that is part of humanity.

We are each, everyone of us, in need of God's mercy, forgiveness and grace and the good news is that God is there for each one of us - young and old, male and female, gentile and Jew, black and white, straight or gay, rich or poor, healthy or sick.

When Jesus Christ died on the cross he did not delineate for whom he was dying.

He welcomed the thief next to him into his kingdom; he urged his Father to forgive his tormentors, with his last breath he prayed for those he was leaving behind.

It is easy to interpret today's story as being solely about the temptations we face in our lives – the lust for wealth, power and wellbeing.

But what if we shift the focus away from temptation and instead reflect on God's care, protection and provision for God's people.

Rather than dwelling on our fear of failure or inclination for succumbing to evil, why not celebrate God's resources at our disposal to keep us strong and faithful.

Our psalm this morning reminds us not to put our hope in false powers, especially not in our own powers, but in the God who commands the angels and the powers of holiness.

Our choral response provides God's reassurance: *I will raise you up on eagle's wings, bear you on the breath of dawn, make you to shine like the sun, and hold you in the palm of my hand."*

Forty years in the wilderness for the Israelites;

Forty days in the wilderness for Jesus;

Forty days in Lent for us.

We have entered into the liturgical season where we are called to reflect on our lives and how well we are following Christ's example.

Lent is not something that you will find in the Bible.

Lent was invented by the early church fathers who had a concern that people were getting too comfortable in their faith.

The early church leaders were afraid that people were forgetting that Jesus Christ was sacrificed for our sins and that the price we must pay is faithfulness to God.

Lent was developed as time when people could prepare to join the church or recommit themselves to the practices of prayer, service and worship.

It is as a time when we are simply called to be more aware of our thoughts and actions.

A time to think deeply about how we get ourselves into places we ought not be and how we can turn to God to help us get out.

It is a time to renew our trust in our forgiving and merciful God.

How about us?

Do we need a nudge from the church fathers?

How comfortable are you in your faith?

Do you work at it or is it just part of your routine?

Is your faith solid enough to sustain you in the face of temptation?

What can we learn in just 40 days?

We can relearn the truth that God is ever present in our lives ready to guide us and support us through the most challenging times.

We can remember that we are part of a community-interconnected on many levels.

One author suggested that we think of Lent as a *spiritual fitness program*.

Rather than choosing one action, she suggests that a Lent discipline must involve a whole-life effort to be more loving, more trusting, more courageous, more humble, as well as a bit lighter, more hopeful, more filled with joy.

She suggests “If, for example, we’re carrying a grudge, our load will be lighter if we let it go - a very different kind of thing to give up.

If we are preoccupied with material things - food, our car, our house, including worry about all three - we could set our minds to other things: giving an extraordinarily generous gift to another, or seeing things from another's perspective.”

The last line of our reading today says, “When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.”

That means that just because Jesus was successful in resisting temptation this time, it was not to be his last challenge.

What is the “opportune time” for the devil to test you?

When are you most likely to forget that you are beloved by God, strengthened by the Holy Spirit?

Is it when you are tired and weary?

Or could it be when you feel you are on top of the world?

We tend to think of temptation as the lure to do something bad but remember it is a turning away from God.

Forgetting to give thanks to the one who created you and bestowed the gifts that make you successful is as sinful as hating someone or telling a lie.

We often find ourselves in a wilderness of our own creation.

Henry David Thoreau, said, "Generally speaking, a howling wilderness does not howl: it is the imagination of the traveler that does the howling."

What are the things in your life that howl in the wilderness?

What is your inner voice telling you?

How do you quiet them?

Who do you turn to?

This Lenten season, I urge you to turn to God and your neighbor.

Ever so gently, with a spirit of repentance, turn your face to the one who holds you in the palm of his hand and pray these words from St. Francis:

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is error, the truth;

Where there is doubt, the faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

And where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,

Grant that I may not so much seek

To be consoled, as to console;

To be understood, as to understand;

To be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.