

## **WILL YOU KEEP ME COMPANY THESE FORTY DAYS?**

**Deacon Colleen Spaeth – Grace Church in Haddonfield**

**First Sunday in Lent – Feb 29<sup>th</sup>, 2004**

The story goes like this: on the way home from church a little boy asked his mother, "Is it true, Mommy, that we are made of dust?" "Yes, dear."

"And do we go back to dust again when we die?"

"Yes, dear. Why do you ask?"

"Well, Mommy, when I said my prayers last night and looked under the bed, I found someone who is either coming or going."

Welcome to Lent! If you didn't look under your bed this week, maybe you came to church on Wednesday and left with ashes in the form of a cross on your forehead.

The forty days and nights began just a few days ago. Now we are at the First Sunday of Lent, and who do we come face to face with? The devil! What's the devil got on his mind? What he always has on his mind – tempting Jesus. Now as I read Luke's story, I wondered why did Jesus put up with all that garbage from Satan anyway? He was on a high

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after all. Remember we just heard about his baptism in the river Jordan, and the special guest appearance of the Holy Spirit. Everybody around the water that day knew then and there that Jesus was Jesus, the Son of God, and the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry takes off.

So here we are now with Jesus on this spiritual high and you'd expect to read that he heads off on his journey. But that's not what is to happen. We hear the Jesus is heading to the wilderness, the desert. And who is his company during this time? The disciples you hope? Some converted followers, family? Some quiet time maybe with the ones he is closest too – maybe a vestry retreat of sorts, or a strategic planning meeting, map out the journey ahead, set some goals.

But not what happens. Along comes Satan, and he goes about his work. So anyway, why doesn't Jesus just tell his Father to tell Satan where to go anyway? After all, we're

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talking Jesus here, right, what's wrong with HIT THE ROAD  
SATAN?

But Jesus is not a regal king, he is humble Jesus, and his way is not of freedom from troubles, but the Jesus we see in the Lucan version of the Gospel is a fully alive human, willing to show us the way.

As I read of Satan's antics with our Lord, I couldn't forget the red comb. When I was about twelve years old, I went downtown to the Woolworths. I didn't have any money with me, I was just browsing, you might say, just away from home and wandering around the store. I saw this really pretty plastic red comb. I had to have it. What's more I had to have it without paying for it. The challenge of getting out of the store with it in my pocket was palpating. I wish I could say why I felt that way, and what about the red comb touched me so much and tempted me in such a sinful way, but I can't. All I remember feeling is the gnawing need to

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have the comb. *I* got home with the comb, and after two days of worrying if my mother would find it hiding under my slippers, I went back to the store, and confessed to the manager that I had taken the comb without paying for it. I'll never forget that red comb.

And now, all these years later there are still many red comb issues in my life. Things I can't do without, that my life will dramatically change after I get. It is a funny thing, how the early lessons in life can follow us and haunt us forever, isn't it?

Lent is a time to examine the temptations, I think. We would all like to imagine and hope that if we're good Christians, live a good life, are responsible, faith-full, that there will be a reward for us somewhere, sometime, don't you think? Maybe our life will be easier than others we know, after all, we're doing all that God would ask, right?

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But no, that is not the way.

I wonder if it would do any good to realize that experiencing temptations may not mean we are sinful, but may mean that you are strong and worthy of the bother. After all Jesus was tempted, right, and he was regarded as sinless by God and his followers.

The devil is not interested in tempting you if you are already on his side, to be sure, so it might do us all well to worry more about our spiritual state if we feel no temptations.

Maybe the fact that you are tempted is not proof that your faith is weak, or that you are a bad person, but rather proof that Satan is trying to get you to do something which you know you shouldn't do.

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Now I must admit that Episcopalians don't mention that devil much. It might be too catholic, too weird, and we all know the Episcopalians worry about how they look.

It reminds me of the story of the wife that quizzed her husband after church one morning. "Did you see what Mrs. Jones was wearing?" Mr. Jones, "No!"

"Did you see who Mr. Smith was with?" Mr. Jones, "No!"

The wife replies, "a lot of good it does you to come to church!"

So it might be that we tune out the scripture that mentions that devil. After all, when was the last time you experienced Satan in the flesh?

But the devil is sharp, and multi-faceted. You might say he has multiple personalities, numerous names. There's jealousy, bigotry, prejudice, anger, loneliness, superiority.

Yes, the devil of today is sharp. Money can actually look like IT IS the way to happiness! We can convince ourselves

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that our church would be a better place if “those” type of people weren’t allowed to worship, and grow with God like we hope to, we can almost feel like it’s okay to play GOD, after all it’s for the betterment of the church. Let’s turn our back, forget about the greatest commandment of all, to LOVE ONE ANOTHER. We have made it okay to make issues more important than people. It would appear that we might have rewritten the commandment. God did say love only those like us, didn’t he? Why else would we expect that everyone else should look and think like us? Are we the followers of Jesus only if we feel good, if we are comfortable? If that is so, then something is drastically wrong, and the Gospel of Luke should shake us at our root.

My brothers and sisters, Lent is more than an invitation, it is a summons. The greatest temptations are seldom about weaknesses, but more of a play on our strengths.

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With incredible resolve, and using the power of God's word alone, Jesus renounces the shortcuts offered by the guy who would be in charge, preferring to travel a road less traveled, a road for us, for our salvation. The path that Jesus took, was one where in the end everyone deserted him, unable to accept his Messiahship. In the end all that was left for Jesus was his trust for his Father, and his Father's love. Nothing else was certain. That path, full of questions, doubts, darkness and temptations he experienced is now all these years later a blazing light for us.

We are called by name, Come along this road with me, says Jesus, during these quick forty days of Lent, give up a little, give a little more, and watch yourself change, just watch!