

The man and the woman in the proto story of the Garden of Eden were tempted by a force outside themselves who appeared in the form of a snake. Poor snake. Such a bad reputation from that story. Jesus in the wilderness was tempted by the evil one. Each gets a chance to make choices when presented with power, prestige, and plenty to eat – the chance to have a full belly.

The man and the woman do not make the right choice – they wanted to be like a god. Jesus, who called on God through prayer and recalling of scripture as he was walking through the wilderness got some help, and of course made the right choices.

During this season of Lent, and to start off our Lenten season, I would like us to consider all the many ways that we can find help to make the right choices to not seek power and prestige for ourselves, but to instead think about others. There are so many ways we can get outside ourselves and do something for someone else. The choices are always before us.

I just saw our friend, and long time parishioner, Bob, yesterday. He's slowing down a lot. The last time I saw him before this he was just coming out of surgery. Alice and I went to Charlotte Hungerford in Torrington to check in on him. And we were a bit surprised to not find him in his room but on a gurney just coming back from recovery.

Well, Bob is hanging in there. He was happy to see Alice and remember that Holly worked with her in the kitchen. In the discussion we had yesterday I talked to him a little about politics. And then I moved the conversation on to another subject Bob enjoys. "What are your favorite Bible passages, Bob?"

Bob started quoting: "*Half a league, half a league, Half a league onward, All in the valley of Death Rode the six hundred.*" –(Alfred Lord Tennyson "The Charge of the Light Brigade")

Bob loves remembering that poem and others. And even though there are many things he can't remember anymore, he always remembers his poetry. Back in his days in high school and college they memorized poetry. What a concept!

Then I asked him, are there any **Bible** stories that you remember that are important to you?

"Yes," he said, "Yes, I've always liked the story of the Good Samaritan." So, I found the story in the Bible I had with me. It's in the Gospel of Luke and I read it to him. "Yes," he said. "I do like that one."

We talked about it some together, but I was just so struck by the fact that even if he can't remember many things, he could remember that Good Samaritan story. He told me that he liked that it was about a stranger, not a priest, not a holy person, but just a regular guy, helped the injured man at the side of the road.

I'm bringing this up this morning to look at side by side with the temptation of Jesus as told by Matthew, because Bob really had the love of that story because it's also about making a choice – to forget what we may want for ourselves, to stay clean, to not get involved, or what we might consider doing for someone.

The choices Jesus made as he spent time in the wilderness show us how we too can come through times when we're tempted and get in the habit of making choices that feed our souls rather than wound our souls.

After Jesus was baptized at the Jordan river, he went out into the wilderness. To get from the Jordan river, at the place where it is believed that Jesus was baptized, to either Jerusalem, or to Galilee, one must traverse a LOT of wilderness. And you can see from the picture on the front of your bulletin, that's what the wilderness looks like there. It's pretty much devoid of plants and trees and water. It's very much a desert scene.

In that hot, arid wilderness Jesus was tempted. He was tempted to be powerful. He was tempted to have as much food, and material goods as he wanted. He was tempted to be able to perform any feat.

We, hearing that Jesus made the right choices about these temptations, think that Jesus passed this one time of testing and that was that. But surely, Jesus must have faced temptations all through his ministry. He had crowds listening to him, wanting to be healed by him, he would have been making choices all through his earthly life.

So, the parallel with the Good Samaritan is that the man from Samaria also made a good choice – to help someone who was in trouble. That was a choice that men who were in a better position to help their fellow Jew chose not to make.

Remember too that the Samaritan was a foreigner. The man hurt at the side of the road was a Jew... so it was all the more painful that his fellow citizens did not want to help him. But a man whose skin may have been darker than his, a man of a different culture, and a different ethnic background, offered to help the Jew who was injured by the side of the road.

We are tempted on a daily basis too. We are faced with choices to do something that will make us spiritually healthy or spiritually sick.

In this season of Lent, I encourage us all to take on a new habit of helping people who are not like us. We have all made wrong choices in our lives. We are not perfect. Some choices have led us down a difficult and unhealthy path. Some of our choices have seemed innocuous and not harmful to anyone. And some of them have had major consequences in our lives. And still we are here. We now can

make a new choice in this new season of reflection and repentance. Just as the choices that Jesus made at his temptation set him on the path of holiness and continued right choices, the same can happen with us.

This weekend I also attended the annual Companions in Mission Conference held in West Hartford. I learned of ongoing opportunities to help people in the Dominican Republic, in Haiti, and to continue to help the refugees who are living in our midst, and have such grateful hearts to be here.

One refugee woman who spoke is a widow and now single mother who came here about a year ago with her children. Her husband had been killed in fighting in Syria, and she came here feeling both devastated and hopeful. She now works full time, and also has a business of her own too in which she makes decorative pillows. Her children are thriving in school and an Episcopal Church was with her every step of the way as she got her feet on the ground, got to work, and has now become self-sufficient.

here at church and in our community. If you haven't put food in the basket in a while, please consider doing so. If you are already tapped out because you're making lasagna for next week's dinner at the Bitterman Center, then find another way to help. Call on someone in a nursing home. There are seasons in which we should rest and practice self-care. But this week, and for the weeks of Lent, how about considering making the choice to lend a hand, give a good word, or have a conversation in which you listen more than speak.

I will do my best to do this too. Paul tells us to run the race and that the free gift of God to us is Life in Christ Jesus. We have many choices in this life. Let's choose Christ.