

## Making Choices

Lent 1 February 14, 2016

A reflection by Peggy Jensen

Prayer: O Holy God, you challenge us in many ways, to face our fears, our temptations and our faithfulness. Guide us through our wilderness times. Give us open eyes and open hearts so that we can see possibilities instead of probabilities. May the thoughts and words that we share inspire us as we begin our journey through Lent. Amen

Flashback one month ago, Sunday January 17th. We were there on the Mt. of Temptation and it doesn't look quite like I imagined it from the scriptures. Earlier in the day we had been to the River Jordan, where I did renew my baptismal vows. I also remembered you folk as I tossed a stone into the murky water of the Jordan River, sending ripples of blessing from there to here. From there we went into Jerico, a bustling Palestinian town with lots of history. What I remember about Mt. Temptation is the big restaurant with a great buffet. There was an incredible souvenir shop beside it, where we had lots of fun looking. I bought these earrings and Kris was tempted to buy some special Hebron wine goblets. From there we stopped on top of a hill and I was distracted by the stray cats. I went to get a picture and three Arab gentlemen were having lunch and they offered me a taste of the pita and meat. It was delicious! All the folks at this stop were so friendly! Kris went the other way to see some camels. SO I almost missed the point that this was the Mt. of Temptation, or did I?

So often life is like that, I can get so caught up in worldly things that I miss the Spiritual moment. Temptations can be distracting.

A vivid memory is the barren Judean wilderness. The pictures we've seen hardly capture the bleak barren land of rolling brown hills with absolutely no visible life. No trees or water sources. No life. I could certainly imagine Jesus wandering and feeling very disoriented. This is a very bleak landscape.

In the Gospel reading for today. Jesus is wandering in this Judean wilderness for 40 days and he encounters the devil who has contrived many ways to tempt and challenge Jesus. You know the story. The 40 days are to remind us of Moses years in the wilderness. We have 40 days of Lent, not including Sunday that lead us to Holy Week. This is a significant time in the Christian year, I hope you will take time to reflect on your own Spiritual journey through Lent this year.

I would like you to take hold of your stone and I will say a little more about the stones. This pamphlet is for you to take home with your stone. Find a place where you can collect your stones and use this for your reflection, scripture, prayer, or mediation time during Lent. What ever feels right for you. Hold your stone now.

After 40 days in the wilderness the devil said to Jesus:

*“If you are the Son of God command this stone to become a loaf of bread.”*

What would you like to turn your stone into?

Perhaps you do not need bread but there are many people in the world who go hungry.

Bread is slang for money, is that what you need your stone to be, money?

Most of us think about something practical and tangible.  
What about your Spiritual hunger?....

Jesus answered “ *One does not live by bread alone.* ”

Then the devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and said:

*...If you will worship me, it will be all yours.* ”

Can we be tempted to take control? Temptation is too religious, let's think about making choices. Everyday we make choices, some more significant than others. What about environmental choices— we say we care about the environment! God's world!

You probably use cloth bags for groceries but do you recycle every paper cup”?

At the worship meeting on Friday we had quite a discussion about the amount of paper we use in the weekly bulletins. We decided to use Bibles instead of printing scripture readings. It's great that the announcements are electronic but can we do more.

What about the choices we make with our friends and family. How we speak to one another matters. Some of us like to take control of things, just to make sure things get done. Perhaps we like to take control so that things get done our way? All of us will benefit if we think about how we speak with one another or converse through emails. You know what I mean about responding to an email.... we make a choice about what is said and how it is intended to be read. I think it is very important that we think about our responses to one another carefully. You have a choice about your response!

One choice may be “ We have always done it that way and I don't want it to change!” or “That is a new way to do it, maybe we could try that?”

Are you tempted to be in control?

Jesus answered: “ *Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.* ”

Then the devil took Jesus to Jerusalem and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple and said:

*“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here.”* ”

I remember walking in Old Jerusalem and the guide pointed to this tall spire and told us that was where the devil took Jesus. We were just walking and there was a Jesus moment. So often in our daily lives we forget that Jesus is present. The Spirit is with us and understands our life situations.

Are you tempted to challenge God to change situations that are impossible? Rather than testing the power of God , perhaps we can pray for the understanding and ability to accept the things we cannot change.

Jesus answered : “ *Do not put the Lord your God to the test.* ”

Lent is a time to acknowledge and respond to God's offer to dwell in our hearts. Make a choice be aware of God's presence with you, no matter what the circumstances of your life. The Spirit led Jesus in the wilderness not to the wilderness.

God is present now and always. Thanks be to God.