

A Hope After the Fall
Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7
March 1, 2020

The late American country music singer and actress Lari White had a song called “Lead me not into temptation.” The lyrics of the chorus say these words: “Lead me not into temptation. I already know the road all too well. Lead me not into temptation. I can find it all by myself.”¹

It makes us chuckle, doesn’t it? But as we think about it, we realize that it is a true and honest statement of the human condition. Temptation is as old as humanity.

In the third chapter of Genesis, the Lord God took Adam, the man he created, and put him in the Garden of Eden to manage it, to take care of it. He told the man, “You can eat from any tree in the garden; except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”

The woman replied, “No, he said we could eat from any tree in the garden. But God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden. Don’t even touch it; otherwise, you will die.’”

“No, you will not die! Absolutely not!” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

When the woman heard that and saw the tree, the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil looked good, looked very tasty, and desirable for gaining wisdom. So, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then their eyes were opened, and they realized they were naked; so, they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

We’ve heard that story many times. We all know that story. More than that, we all know the power of temptation. There is vulnerability in all of us.

¹ <https://genius.com/Lari-white-lead-me-not-lyrics>

From the beginning, human beings have always been prone to temptation – tempted to covet and take, tempted to anger and revenge, tempted to lust and possess, tempted to conquer and rule, tempted to lie and manipulate, and the list goes on and on.

One thing we need to know is that when someone is being tempted, it does not mean that they are living a substandard Christian life. It does not mean that something is wrong with them, or they are immoral or disobedient. It is not a sin to be tempted but it is a sin to yield to the temptation.

Temptation always begins as a suggestion. It begins in the mind. As it stays there longer, it becomes an invisible struggle of the will. Because other people cannot see what is going on in our hearts, it is easier to entertain the temptation longer than we should.

Some temptations are for self-gratification, some are negative, some immoral and some even purely evil. But then, some temptations can confuse us because they appear to be good and harmless. It does not harm anyone. Think about Jesus' temptations for a moment.

After Jesus was baptized, he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. He spent forty days and forty nights fasting, meditating and preparing for his ministry. After forty days of fasting, he was hungry. He was hungry because he was fully human. Then the temptation came as a suggestion. The tempter simply suggested that Jesus turn some of those rocks into bread and eat them. Now, is it really bad to do that. If Jesus had the power to do it, and he was hungry, why not? What is wrong with that? What is so bad about it? What if Jesus actually turned the rocks into sweet rolls and ate them, what could be the harm in doing that?

The problem is that the focus of this temptation was not to satisfy Jesus' physical needs. It was to change the purpose of Jesus' ministry. For Jesus, changing the rocks into bread was to deviate from his true mission. Even the subsequent temptations would have the same result. When the devil suggested to Jesus that he demonstrate his power by jumping off from the top of the temple or to possess all the power in the world, it would make Jesus deviate from his true mission. His mission definitely included meeting the physical needs of the people. That is why he fed the multitude and healed the sick. His ministry would show his power and authority. It would give people hope for their country and for their future but that was not the ultimate purpose of Jesus' ministry. His ministry was to bring his people back to God.

The time Jesus spent in the wilderness was the time for him to prepare his heart for the upcoming ministry. His ministry was to satisfy a deep hunger in people, a hunger beyond physical needs. It was to satisfy their hunger for God. The temptation Jesus faced was to concentrate only on the physical needs of the people: providing bread to eat and to bring healing to the sick. These were important works, no doubt but that was not the purpose of his ministry. It was to bring the humanity back to God.

Had Jesus allowed himself to be drawn into that temptation, focusing only on the physical needs of the people, Jesus could have been a wonderful social worker, a marvelous politician. He could have given what the people wanted: bread, healing and prosperity. He could have drawn enormous amounts of followers. He could have established his kingdom on earth easily but that would not necessarily bring people back to God. Jesus' mission was greater than this. It was to reconcile the sinful humanity with God. That is why he said, "Man shall not live by bread alone but on every word of God." Obeying God's word would bring the humanity back to God.

His ultimate goal was to give himself as the universal atonement for sin for all humanity. His purpose was to be the lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world.

This is the essence of the Gospel, Christ being our atonement. Who among us is without sin? No one! All humanity in every generation have sinned against God and other people, including you and me. We are hopelessly sinful. We have not been able to control our impulses or overcome our temptations.

Because temptations start from within, we need to take responsibility for all our sins.

John Profumo (1915-2006) was the Secretary of State for War for Great Britain. He was a man with a long career in politics. When he was appointed as the Secretary of State for War in 1960, he was only 45 years old. He was young and powerful. His brilliant career abruptly ended in 1963 after a sexual relationship with a 19-year old English model named Christine Keeler. That affair happened in 1961. When he met Christine Keeler, Profumo was absolutely infatuated with this young woman. He could not stop thinking about her. So, when he had an opportunity, he began a secret relationship with her. What he did not know was that Christine Keeler was having a romantic relationship with a Soviet naval attaché in London – a member of the KGB, a Russian spy. She was

having both affairs at the same time. It became a national security issue for Great Britain. So, when the story of his affair with Christine Keeler broke out, Profumo resigned from his position immediately.

The whole affair was the most sensational sex scandal of 1960s. You know how this whole thing started. The moment Profumo saw Christine Keeler, he was totally smitten by her. He could not stop thinking about her. His mind was filled with the thought of having an affair with her. He was married at the time to an actress, Valerie Hobson and he knew what he was thinking was not right. It was immoral and unethical but he could not stop thinking about Christine Keeler. That thought led to an action that forever changed his life.

But this was not the end of his life. He understood how his recklessness had brought embarrassment to his wife and his country. He did not want this shame to be his legacy.

Soon after he resigned from his position, he contacted Toynbee Hall, a charitable mission in East London and asked whether they needed any help. He was willing to do whatever they needed. They hesitated at first knowing the scandal but eventually accepted his offer. He volunteered there, washing dishes, cleaning the halls, and helping with the children's play groups. He would remain there for the next forty years. He used his political skills and connections to raise funds for Toynbee Hall. He was the major fund raiser for them. Later he became the chairman of Toynbee Hall, and also became the President of it. Profumo was from a wealthy family and was able to live on his inherited wealth. So, all his work was done voluntarily, never receiving a payment from them. His passionate voluntary work was his way of achieving personal redemption for the public shame he had caused.

John Profumo took responsibility for his sin. He did not blame anyone. He did not blame the society or media or the person who introduced him to Christine Keeler. You know, this is always the first step in dealing with any transgression. Calling our sin as SIN! and recognizing it as sin and a violation against God. Not a mistake. Not simply being human. It is the sin that started in our hearts and was expressed in our actions. The first step to deal with it is to take responsibility for it.

Then take it to the Lord. When we take it to the Lord with a contrite heart, we experience a true healing and the grace of the Lord. This is the only way to find hope after the fall. In this Lent season, let us examine ourselves honestly, and find a true healing and restoration through penitence and a change of heart and life.