

# A HEALTHY APPETITE

## Sermon, February 14, 2016

### The First Sunday in Lent

#### Text: Luke 4:1-13

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."  
- Matthew 5:7

Hunger and thirst are rather essential human appetites. These appetites are not bad things; we were designed by our Creator to hunger and thirst. It is a sign of physical health to be hungry and thirsty. It is a sign of life to have desire. In fact, the only people without desire are dead people. After a sickness, it's a sign we are regaining our health when we begin to get hungry again. But as we all know, health is best maintained by eating the right things. In and of itself, the appetite is good, but how we fill the appetite isn't always good, and can work against our health and well-being. Have you ever been really hungry and dove into an entire bag of chips or Doritos? I actually sort of did both recently ... after a Lenten fast I decided to try a new snack I bought on sale at Dave's grocery store ... Tortatos, advertised as a healthier alternative snack food, a blend of corn and red potatoes (*sort of a combination of Doritos and potato chips*).<sup>1</sup> As you guessed, it wasn't long before the whole bag was gone ... and I wound up fighting heartburn just about all night. Filling the demands of appetite in that way may take away the hunger for a while, but that kind of response to the craving won't satisfy in the long run.

The Christian faith affirms desire is good, that it is the God-created nature of human beings to be hungry and thirsty; again, it is a sign that you are alive. That is true physically and that is true spiritually. *"Blessed are those who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness,"* Jesus tells us in His beatitudes; blessed are those who earnestly desire and have an appetite for what is good and right. The problem is not that we have appetites and desires; the problem is that we keep trying to fill those God-given desires with the wrong things. Things that never fully satisfy. Spiritual Tortatos. Temptation might be understood as anything that seeks to satisfy our good appetites and desires with anything less than what is good, with things that really don't satisfy, with things that don't nourish physical and/or spiritual health and more often than not work against it. Sometimes it is believed truly spiritual people aren't bothered by temptation, that they are so filled with the Holy Spirit that they are never inclined to fill their hungers and desires inappropriately. I've mentioned before that there is a theological term for that belief; in the original Latin it is pronounced: *"Bah - LOE - nee."* Jesus was the embodiment of true spirituality, and He was strongly tempted by the devil in the wilderness! Temptation has a very real appeal to our deepest God given hungers ... and what the Tempter was offering Jesus was appealing to Him.

The first of the temptations of Jesus is perhaps the most primal, which is the temptation to do whatever it takes to immediately satisfy your appetite. *"Scratch your itch, fill your belly, satisfy your urges and appetites. That's what's important in life, that's how you find fulfillment."* No, there is something far more important in life than just satisfying appetites. Jesus responded, *"It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"* As a bit of an aside, I want to note something about this initial temptation that is easily missed. The subtle but potentially deadly temptation here is to doubt God. The context for this wilderness trial is that Jesus had just been baptized by John. God's audible voice had spoken clearly from the heavens at that baptism saying, "THIS IS MY SON." With this voice still ringing in Jesus' ears, along comes the devil saying, *"If you are the Son of God ..."* I like to imagine Jesus responding, *"What do you mean, 'IF?' God just SAID I'm His Son. I don't need to turn stones into bread or any other magical tricks to prove it."* This was the mistake Adam and Eve made, allowing the Tempter to foster doubt about what God had CLEARLY SAID and then appealing to a desire that yearned to be filled. No, Jesus says, there is something more important in life than just satisfying desires ... and that is hearing, heeding, obeying every word of God and THEN satisfying our desires accordingly!

But in the little time we have this morning, I want to focus on the second temptation, which I think was the most intense temptation Jesus faced, because this is one appealing to His deepest longing ... which is His desire to save the world. That was His whole reason for being here, that the world might be saved through Him. I believe that's the divinely-instilled desire being appealing to. The devil took him to this high place, they looked out over all the kingdoms of the world, and the devil said, *"All of these are mine, but I'll give it all to you if you will simply worship me."* And Jesus answered, *"It is written, worship the Lord your God and serve Him only."*

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.rwgarcia.com/products/tortatos/>

Notice Jesus does not say, "Well, what do I care about the kingdoms of the world? I don't want them." No. Jesus would love to have the kingdoms of the world. He wants to **save** them, and all in them. So, this is not a temptation about *ends*, this is a temptation about *means*. This is a temptation about how to go about getting the really good thing Jesus wanted. The devil is not tempting Jesus to forget about all this Messiah business. "Forget about the world Jesus, just think about yourself. Look, I have this nice place in the Adirondacks ... uh, no, that'd be too cold today ... I have this nice place in the Bahamas, you can have it. Sunny, warm, beautiful condominiums, fishing boat, golf courses nearby ... you'll be set for life; just forget about the world, all right?" The devil knew Jesus wouldn't be tempted by that. What was tempting was the devil offering Jesus an easier way, a quicker way, a "practical" way ... albeit a slightly diabolical way ... to help Jesus achieve Jesus' own goals, to help Jesus satisfy His deepest desire. *That's* temptation.

I think it's safe to assume that since you are in church today you probably aren't intent on worshiping the devil. Of course not. So many of you here have lofty ideals, high hopes; you are people who have committed your lives to good things, like raising children, serving the community, working in hospitals and schools and the marketplaces, and you have given so much time and energy to the church and other charitable organizations. This is what you want to do. This is how you've chosen to spend your lives, contributing to things that are good and upright and purposeful and even holy. It is highly unlikely the devil is going to show up and try to tempt you by asking you to, say, go rob a bank or manage an adult book store. No, he doesn't ask us to give up on our high purposes or our great ambitions or good hopes or lofty visions for the world around us. What the devil asks is that we simply be, well, *realistic* about what it's going to take to get the good job done. After all, the Tempter claims, this world all belongs to him ... that evil and corruption is now so systemic and intrinsic, so much a part of the system, that if you're going to succeed in the "real" world, well, you'll just have to get flexible and comply with how it is. He insists that the ends will justify something of an unfortunate, less than idealistic means which you will just have to resort to. If you really want to make changes, if you really want the resources to raise your children well, if you really want to have all you need to provide for your family, if you really want to \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank), well, that can be arranged. All you have to do is make a little deal with the devil. Just make a few compromises along the way, a few quick genuflects in his direction, that nobody has to see or know about.

Often we take the devil's deal even if we don't fully realize it. At first we just, oh, tell a little fib on that application because we really need the job. We fudge that line on the tax return because we want more money to give to the church. Whatever it is, time and again we just turn a Nelson's eye<sup>2</sup> to things around us we instinctively know to be wrong. Before long, though, we realize that there is so much wrong around us that we're starting to become blind to that which is right and true and good. But by then it's too late to make changes; we're in too deep, we have too many obligations, and now the best we can do is muddle along and try to cope with how it is. Now it is good Presbyterian doctrine to say that we live in a fallen world, and, tragically, that means that sometimes we are stuck with a choice between two evils. Yes, we are sometimes caught with bad choices in life. But if we're really honest, we know that really doesn't happen as often as we like to think. We excuse ourselves by saying the world is too complicated to make good choices. But the most important choice we have to make is to decide whether or not God is more powerful than the devil.

Take one quick glance at the world around us, and it's clear the devil has plenty of power. The deal he wants you to make is to help you get where you're going ... he'll use his power to help you do that, all you have to do, he says, is simply give in. Just a little. Stop being so idealistic; who do you think you are, anyway, the son of God? We sure would like to meet these goals, they're good goals. And we've learned now that we have to be realistic about what it takes to get things done. So maybe we do make a deal or two with how it is. But eventually we realize that the deal costs too much. God has so much more power than the devil, and the power God will use in your life will always lead to deep satisfaction. The power the devil will use will always lead to disappointment, hurt, destruction. It does not satisfy. "Devil's food" is always carcinogenic.

If you find that you've made a bad deal or two (or three or four or more) with "how it is" with the world, the path to satisfaction is not to settle for how it is, nor is it to make more deals or more compromises, as if you could somehow manage your way out of this situation. No, the path to freedom is to worship God, and live by His word. Then you will be increasingly unafraid to say no to things that are wrong. It doesn't matter how old you are, it doesn't matter how many compromises you have made with how it is, it doesn't matter how deep you are in ... today is the day to say no to the devil's lousy deal for your life. The devil took him up to that high place, and all that the devil could show Jesus was the world they saw. But Jesus resisted the temptation because He was committed to the REAL world He couldn't see, the real world of the Kingdom of God, and He hungered and thirsted to see that kingdom come on earth, on God's terms, not the tempter's.

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<sup>2</sup> See 10/25/15 sermon at <https://greenwoodchurch.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/turning-a-nelsons-eye.pdf>