

Sermon Title: **Temptation**

Bible: **Genesis 3:1-7 & Matthew 4:1-11**

Where & When: 1st Sunday in Lent at Gilroy UMC on March 1, 2020

Audience: about 34 English-speaking Church Members

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, thank you so much for giving us 40 days of Lent. We remember Jesus during Lent. Please give us your wisdom and your love to us. Please be with my lips in your love and grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

1. Ice Cream & Marshmallow Experiment

I believe that everybody has temptations in our lives. To me, ice cream is always a big temptation. When I start to eat ice cream, it is challenging as to when to stop eating ice cream. Have you heard of the Marshmallow Experiment? This test was originally done by a professor at Stanford University in 1972. The test was simple: to children, a marshmallow is a temptation. A child receives one marshmallow at first. If the kid waits, the kid can get another marshmallow later. Let us see what it looks like: <https://youtu.be/Yo4WF3cSd9Q> Can you receive the second marshmallow? If they tested me with my favorite ice cream, I might fail the test. I might rationalize as to why I ate the ice cream, as it would melt. I could not receive the second ice cream.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus had three temptations. Kind of half truth or distorted intentions attacked him. For example, the first temptation is to make stones into bread. Absolutely, we need food to eat! However, food itself is not enough for us to live. We need family, community, education, wisdom, love, etc. That's because we are human beings in body, mind, and spirit. As we read, the temptations of Jesus came even after Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights. When Jesus was highly spiritual, the temptations began. I thought that because

I am a good Christian, there would be no more temptations. However, temptations are before me, in other forms. So, I would like to share my own temptations, as a Christian and as a pastor.

2. Scapegoat

Originally, the concept of scapegoat came from the Bible. The goat is a sacrifice. The goat is punished instead of human beings for their sins. Unfortunately, making scapegoats is my temptation. When something bad happens, I would like to point out what made that happen. Honestly speaking, sometimes I was searching for the one to be blamed. What caused the car accident? How about the hurricane, a virus, or cancer? Bad things can happen for many reasons: because some people make mistakes; because the system is not functioning well or just because. However, my temptation is to search out the scapegoat. I thought that if I pointed out the scapegoat and removed it, the problems can be solved. However, it is not true. To point out the scapegoat is not the solution, but it is a vicious cycle. I could point out another scapegoat, and this process will never end, because there are always problems in my life. In this vicious cycle of scapegoating, there is no love, no mercy, but rather, hatred and fear.

When Jesus put Himself in the place of the scapegoat, my temptation disappeared. When Jesus was on the cross, my pointing out the scapegoat was stopped. I cannot point out Jesus as the scapegoat. Jesus Christ came on the earth, to save us. On the cross, He is with us even in our suffering. He breaks the vicious cycle of hating each other. He embraces our tears and sufferings, and our lack of love. When the temptation, to point out the scapegoat, comes to me, I

see the cross. I see Jesus. And I see myself with Jesus on the cross. Then, I can overcome this temptation.

3. Workaholics

Do you love this church? I love this church. I love to serve this church. But am I a workaholic or a hard worker? I am a hard worker, and I think that I bring out many good results. I am proud of myself and my church. However, sometimes, this can be my temptation. I could be arrogant. 'It is all because of me.' 'Because of me, this church can survive.' 'Because of me, this church will grow.' 'Without me, can this church make a difference?' This is not good. Actually, this is bad for me as well as the church. That's because I try to serve this church alone. I would not listen to others. At first, it might look like it works well. But eventually, it will ruin everyone: the church, the church members, and me as well.

How can I face and overcome this temptation? I believe that Sabbath, one day off a week, is one way to overcome this temptation. Taking a vacation is another way. Taking Sabbath or vacations does not mean that I do not care about the church. I really care about the church, but I do not want to spoil the church. Pastor-centered church might be powerful, but it might be the church on sand, not on the rock. Jesus is our rock. I need to remember that this is God's church, not mine. I am not the only servant for this church. As God calls me for this church, God already and still calls the church members, all of you, for this church. I want to be a smart servant for this church, beyond a hard worker. Then, I need to discover, mentor, and coach church leaders and church members, pray together, and serve the church together. I believe that

this is God's way, how to build God's church. Maybe, survival or growth is not our ultimate goal. When we follow Jesus together, God will pour out God's abundant life to us and lead us to grow. Yes, Jesus is our ultimate goal, the beginning and the end.

4. Remember Jesus

In Lent, I hope we can focus on Jesus. Jesus came to us, to save us. Jesus came to suffer with us. He could have saved us without any suffering or without the cross. However, he chose to be on the cross, in order to be with us. We are weak and broken in this world. Sometimes, we are in pain and suffering. Jesus does not want us to be alone. Jesus is with us, even in our suffering.

We are all the body of Jesus Christ. Each of you are important. Each of you are the one to be loved and to love. God does not call only pastors. God is calling you to this church. We are all co-workers for the kingdom of God. We need to work together and serve one another. That's because we are all the body of Christ.

Today is the first Sunday in Lent. When temptations come, let us remember Jesus in the wilderness and on the cross. When we feel lonely, let us see Jesus through each other, the body of Christ. Jesus is already and always with us.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, thank you so much for sending your Son, Jesus Christ. In the Lenten season, we want to learn more about Jesus. Please pour out your love and grace so that we can find you more. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Questions.

1. What temptation do you have?
2. Where is Jesus in your temptation?