

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, First Sunday of Lent, February 26, 2023.

If you were an artist – let’s say a painter – and you wanted to portray the Devil tempting Eve with a fruit – why would you choose an apple as the fruit? Or, would you choose a different fruit?

After all, the episode in Genesis is neutral in terms of what kind of fruit Eve is offered. “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden.” Not necessarily “the apple tree.” Maybe a different tree, a different fruit. Pear? Apricot? Banana?

Of course, the main point of the Genesis passage is not the content of the bribe, but the fact that you and I are bribable by nature. We are choosers. We have free will. Even in the most restrictive environments, we make choices. Obey or disobey. Love or hate. Share or hoard. Live or die. Positive attitude or negative. Hard work or let others do the work.

Well, enough set up. Let’s assume that we talking apple. What are the characteristics of an apple that lend themselves to enticement? Here are four characteristics. An apple has a skin. It has a core. It has seeds. And it has a stem.

If you were the Devil, which of these would be your target? Yes, it would be the seeds, wouldn’t they? The skin, the core, the stem – they are what they are and what they’re going to be. But the seeds? They’re different. Their potential is unknown. Up for grabs, if you will. Bribable. And that characteristic, of course, is what the Devil loves to see.

Now, for you and me, as we eat an apple, the seeds are a pest. But, as we consider our faith, seeds have the potential for fulfillment, both personal and corporate. When the Devil offered the apple to Eve, the Devil was looking to compromise the whole human race, not just a single person. The Devil saw negative potential.

When we visit a garden center, we don’t look for negative potential. We look for positive potential. We’re not attracted to packets of skin or cores or stems. We’re looking for packets of seeds. And, in this setting, we are drawn to the

packet of Jesus seeds. Seeds with the potential and the promise of quality of life for self and neighbor.

Oh yes, we remain bribable. The Devil never rests. The Devil is clever. Sometimes the Devil dresses up as God. Sometimes the temptation is too much to resist. But, sadly for the Devil, God has a secret weapon. It's called **forgiveness**. And it's not forgiveness on a limited scale. It's forgiveness on a massive scale. Too big, as it turns out, for the Devil to counter.

Well, it's too big for the Devil to counter if we accept God's forgiveness and adjust our behavior to align with God's expectation, not the Devil's. In a very interesting twist of fate, God's forgiveness in Christ is a bribe. "You, Eve, will be happier if you accept my gift," says the Lord.

You and I have been there. We have struggled with decisions. And we have made some decisions that weren't the best. But we have also made some decisions that are the best. Loving the Lord, doing our best to fulfill the **Lord's** expectations, is one of those important decisions. We feel good about our faith. We are grateful that, when faced with tough decisions, there generally is one decision that is better for us and others. And what a good feeling it is to take that path rather than the opposite.

The Biblical story of Eve in the Garden being tested by the Devil is not a thing of the past. It is current. Temptation applies daily to you and me. It might not approach us as an apple, but it might well approach us as something else.

But, what also applies daily is God's promise in Jesus to support us in tough decision-making situations. Support that includes forgiveness when we take a path that is not the path that God encourages and expects.

"Bribable." Is it even a word? Oh yes. It's a word. It's a path. It's a trap. But it's also subject to God's Love. From Psalm 32: "Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sin is put away!" St. Paul in this letter to the Romans concurs: "Just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all." Jesus was more succinct in today's Gospel: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."

How that faith in God's forgiveness gets incorporated in the work of art called life is up to us. We are the artist at that point. God provides the canvass. We hold the brush. We choose the colors. We adapt as we go along. It's called freedom. Oh yes, we have a coach, and, yes, there are fellow students. But ultimately we are in charge of our canvass.

In our final hymn today – Go forward, Christian soldier – we are encouraged to “fear not the gathering night.” Why? Because “The Lord has been thy shelter; the Lord will by thy light.”

And that, Mr. Devil, is our response to you! Now, move aside, and let me paint.

Amen.

First Sunday of Lent – February 26, 2023
Morning Prayer

Prelude

Hymn 142 – Lord, who throughout these forty days – stanzas 1-3

Lord, who throughout these forty days didst fast and pray,
teach us with thee to mourn our sins, and close by thee to stay.

As thou with Satan didst contend and didst the victory win,
O give us strength in thee to fight, in thee to conquer sin.

As thou didst hunger bear and thirst, so teach us, gracious Lord,
to die to self, and chiefly live by thy most holy word.

Opening sentence - BCP page 40

I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go into the house of the Lord.”

Invitation to Confession – BCP page 41

So that we may prepare ourselves in heart and mind to worship Almighty God, let us, with penitent and obedient hearts, confess our sins, that we may obtain forgiveness by his infinite goodness and mercy.

Confession – BCP pages 41-42

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep, we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts, we have offended against thy holy laws, we have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and have done those things which we ought not to have done. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, spare thou those who confess their faults, restore thou those who are penitent, according to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord; and grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.

Absolution – BCP page 42

The almighty and merciful Lord grant you absolution and remission of all your sins, true repentance, amendment of life, and the grace and consolation of his Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Gloria – BCP page 42

O Lord, open thou our lips.
And our mouth shall show forth thy praise.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

Venite – BCP page 44

Come, let us sing to the Lord;
 let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation.
Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving,
 and show ourselves glad in him with psalms.
For the Lord is a great God,
 and a great King above all gods.
In his hand are all the corners of the earth,
 and the strength of the hills is his also.
The sea is his and he made it,
 and he prepared the dry land.
O come, let us worship and fall down
 and kneel before the Lord our Maker.
For he is the Lord our God,
 and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.
O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;
 let the whole earth stand in awe of him.
For he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth,
 and with righteousness to judge the world and the people with his truth.

Psalm 32 – insert

First Reading: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Second Reading: Romans 5:12-19 - insert

Hymn 488 – Be thou my vision

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
all else be nought to me, save that thou art –
thou my best thought, by day or by night,
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word;
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord;
thou my great Father; thine own may I be;
thou in me dwelling and I one with thee.

High King of heaven, when victory is won,
May I reach heaven's joys, bright heaven's Sun!
Heart of my heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 4:1-11 - insert

Sermon

Apostles' Creed – pp 53-54

*I believe in God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth;*

*And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried,
He descended into hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father
almighty.
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Ghost,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.*

Lord's Prayer

The Lord be with you.
And with thy spirit.
Let us pray.

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Suffrages A – page 55

O Lord, show thy mercy upon us;
and grant us thy salvation.
Endue thy ministers with righteousness;
and make thy chosen people joyful.
Give peace, O Lord, in all the world;
for only in thee can we live in safety.
Lord, keep this nation under thy care;
and guide us in the way of justice and truth.
Let thy way be known upon earth;
thy saving health among all nations.
Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten;
nor the hope of the poor be taken away.
Create in us clean hearts, O God;
and sustain us with thy Holy Spirit.

Collect for First Sunday of Lent – insert

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ, your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Prayers for Sundays and Guidance Peace – BCP pages 56 and 832

O God, you make us glad with the weekly remembrance of the glorious resurrection of your Son our Lord: Give us this day such blessing through our worship of you, that the week to come may be spent in your favor; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment, and light rises up in darkness for the godly: Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what thou would have us to do, that the spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in thy light we may see light, and in thy straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

General Thanksgiving - BCP pp 58-59

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we thine unworthy servants do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all men. We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful; and that we show forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honor and glory, world without end. *Amen.*

Announcements and *America*

Prayer of St. Chrysostom – BCP, p 59

Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplication unto thee, and hast promised through thy well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name thou wilt be in the midst of them: Fulfill now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting. *Amen.*

The Grace – BCP, p 59

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore.

Hymn 143 – The glory of these forty days

The glory of these forty days we celebrate with songs of praise;
for Christ, through whom all things were made, himself has fasted and has prayed.

Alone and fasting Moses saw the loving God who gave the law;
and to Elijah, fasting, came the steeds and chariots of flame.

So Daniel trained his mystic sight, delivered from the lions' might;
and John, the Bridegroom's friend, became the herald of Messiah's name.

Then grant us, Lord, like them to be full oft in fast and prayer with thee;
our spirits strengthen with thy grace, and give us joy to see thy face.

O Father, Son, and Spirit blest, to thee be every prayer addressed,
who art in threefold Name adored, from age to age, the only Lord.

Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Postlude

Lessons for Lent 1 – February 26, 2023

Collect: Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die." Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Psalm 32

Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven,
and whose sin is put away!

*Happy are they to whom the Lord imputes no guilt,
and in whose spirit there is no guile!*

While I held my tongue, my bones withered away,
because of my groaning all day long.

For your hand was heavy upon me day and night;
my moisture was dried up as in the heat of summer.

Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
and did not conceal my guilt.

I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord."
then you forgave me the guilt of my sin.

Therefore all the faithful will make their prayers to you in time of trouble;
when the waters overflow, they shall not reach them.

You are my hiding-place; you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance.

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go;
I will guide you with my eye.

Do not be like horse or mule, which have no understanding;
who must be fitted with bit and bridle, or else they will not stay near you."

Great are the tribulations of the wicked;
but mercy embraces those who trust in the Lord.

Be glad, you righteous, and rejoice in the Lord;
shout for joy, all who are true of heart.

Second Reading: Romans 5:12-19

Just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned – sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Gospel: Matthew 4:1-11

After Jesus was baptized, he was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to be loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*