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1 Lent: Me I Want to Be, Part One

Rev Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose

Have you ever thought about the impact your decisions have had on you? Do you think that avoiding decisions is a decision with consequences? Our decisions affect us, they shape us, for better or for worse. If I decide to snack while I read, and if I do a lot of reading, then I will weigh a lot. If I use direction lights on my car every time I change lanes, even when nobody else is on the road, then I will be the only person in Santa Clara County who does! If I consider the options, and intentionally chose the answer to a decision that will place me in God's favor, I experience the joy and peace of mind of being more of the person I was created to be.

Following Jesus' baptism by John and by the Holy Spirit, he went into the wilderness to fast for 40 days. He waited until he was thirty years old to step out of obscurity. But the time came that his sense of personal vocation was so intense that it was time to step out, and go public. He knew that God had chosen him for a task; but it seems that he still wanted or needed guidance to more fully understand what this calling should look like.

At his baptism Jesus got confirmation of his new vocation. He experienced the Holy Spirit descending on him, and he heard the voice of God acknowledging him as His Son. After hearing that, as you might imagine, he had a lot to think about. So Jesus followed the Spirit into the desert of Judea for a forty day retreat, to reflect on the nature of the path that lay before him.

Fasting and praying are ancient practices for sharpening spiritual awareness; to intentionally set aside the distractions of food and physical comforts; and after passing through the initial feelings of hunger, to have uncluttered openness to God. But the 'tempter' tried to step in and subvert the process that Jesus was submitting himself to in the desert.

The Devil tried to tempt Jesus by working on his aloneness, hunger, and searching spirit. Those attempts were stopped by Jesus' close relationship with God, and dependence on God. Jesus remembered passages in Scripture that gave him the strength to reject the temptations to use his divine authority and power to ensure his own comfort. Instead he chose the vocation that he knew God had planned for him since well before his human birth.

His confrontation against strong temptations, and his defeat of them demonstrate that he has the power to help us overcome our temptations, and he can help us fulfill God's plan for each of us.

We are starting a study series today based on a book by John Ortberg, titled, 'The Me I Want to Be'. He describes the efforts we make; to pretend to be a certain person, to believe there is a person different than we are that we think we should be; or to be a person we think other people want us to be.

There is another person than those people; there is the person that God had in mind when God created us. Ortberg says, “Jesus’ plan was not to start a church of people who call themselves “Christians” but remain cranky, egotistical, judgmental, deceptive, greedy, lustful, gossipy, self-righteous and religious until they die and go to heaven. Jesus’ plan is to have a church of transformed people who experience and express the joyful life of God together for the sake of others.”

Jesus came up against different pressures over who he should be. The temptations did not stop in the forty days he spent in the wilderness.

In John 6:15 the people tried to crown Jesus as a king. He left.

In Matt 16:22 Peter tried to tempt Jesus to avoid the cross. He went.

In Matt 26:39 the Garden of Gethsemane he was tempted to escape his passion and death. He died.

Adam did not choose to be the person God had in mind; but Jesus did. Jesus always, always chose to reject any human plan, and to align himself with God’s plan.

As long as we are alive, the tempter will not stop tempting us. It is our choice whether we try to live all those other lives I listed earlier, or to live for God; to make choices that align our will with God’s Grace.

When we manage to maneuver ourselves into that flow of divine grace, our lives get better by becoming more what God intended for us when God created us. That is the premise of our study during Lent, and it is the premise I want to explore with you on Sundays, and in our small groups.

If you are not yet in a small group, it is not too late. Consider signing up. This is going to be an enlightening and fun course of study.

1 Timothy 4:7b says, “Train yourself to be godly.” Living in God’s world is both the vision and the practice, the future AND the present, of living the way Jesus did.

Psalm 92:12-13 says, “The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God.” Following Jesus leads us into that flourishing life. We do not become somebody else, but we allow ourselves to become the person we were created to be.

Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness established his total resolve to fulfill God’s plan even above his own comfort or his exercising divine authority over others. He knew what it took to be the person God had planned for him to be. God also has a plan for each of us. The season of Lent is a most appropriate time for us to be examining who we have become, to assess how that fulfills our does not fulfill our own plan and God’s plan for us, and to consider what adjustments may be worth our examining and trying. Join me on this exciting journey into being the person you want to be. AMEN.