

*Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7*

*Romans 5:12-19*

*Matthew 4:1-11*

The life of humanity has been a twisted and sordid tale. Story after story in the Bible show that even people who are admirable for some reasons, have truly struggled for others. It just goes to show that we humans have always had a sense of incompleteness. Longing and desire for... well, something. And it's far more difficult to find the right "thing" to fill it with. It's clear from today's Old Testament lesson that that happened long before us, way back at the beginning.

God had made the world, and humans in God's image. We don't hear all the details in today's reading, but they were given community, so that the Adam was with an Eve. They were placed in a land with many gifts. They were given a vocation, to be good stewards of the life and all the resources. There were some limits – any tree but that one. The garden was basically their oyster.

They had so much. Yet Adam and Eve still wanted something... which was probably difficult for them to even name. They walked around like we do, trying to find the right thing to fill that hole of emptiness. That hole that keeps life from being really great. What would make the difference? Would it be filled by the thing that I could buy? Or the right relationship, if I had it? Perhaps a new job, that's more "satisfying"?

When we listen carefully, their temptation wasn't as sinister as our imaginations make it out to be. The tempter wasn't some sparkly, red-clad devil. It was just one of the garden's other creatures, the quick-thinking serpent. He asked the humans a few questions, poked holes in what they thought they knew. The serpent spoke to their dissatisfaction. It called out their longing for who-knows-what. "It's knowledge that you long for – the restricted kind. Yes, even you can be like God. That is what you want, after all. Forget about what God said."

The next thing they knew, Adam and Eve were sucked into rebellion. They crossed the only real boundary that God set, and ate from the tree. Their action was motivated by becoming "like God, knowing good and evil." (*Gen. 3:5*) Perhaps worst of all, they ignored their good relationship with their creator.



St. Matthew tells us about a different picture of temptation. In this story, the tempter really is the devil. Similarly, the devil spoke to Jesus' deep longings, including food, after forty days of hunger. The biggest longing may have been to be recognized as the "Son of God" – after all, Jesus was human. The wonder of this scene is far more than just the temptations though. It's his responses. In them, we see a glimpse of the big answer to our own longings. The truth with a capital "T."

The devil's first temptation was spoken to the starving hunger in Jesus. Hungry? Solve the problem yourself! But Jesus doesn't fall into the

trap. He answers – it’s not about the bread. The word, a living relationship with God, is what we need for life.

The second temptation was to this human, who also divine. Demonstrate your power with an impressive stunt. Throw yourself down, for you know God will save you. Jesus answered – I don’t need to test my relationship with God. It’s there and I know it.

The third temptation was to Jesus, as perhaps the biggest idealist ever. He must have been walking around thinking, this is not how God would want the world to be. So the devil said, Worship me, and all this power will be yours. Think about what you could do with that much control! Yet Jesus answered – you don’t understand. It’s not about me, it’s about God. And worship is only for God -- never for you.



These two scenes of our faith reveal to us both our longing... and the answer.

In Adam and Eve, we see our discontent, our unmet longings, called out by the world around us. We see our desire to truly be – or at least to feel – in control of our lives appears, again and again. So often, we believe that this time we’ve found the answer. But it never is, is it? Or our sense of satisfaction doesn’t last long at all, and the longing begins again. With Adam and Eve, we see what happens when we forget or ignore God.

In Jesus, we see the other side of temptation. We witness how someone who is solidly grounded in his relationship with God is able to

withstand the challenges of life. Major questions arise about what he needs, or what he should do. Every time, to answer them, Jesus turned to his relationship with the God of Israel. †††

Genesis and Jesus show us something important, though in different ways. Our dissatisfaction and our hunger for something more is a spiritual problem. It is something that our insides are wrestling with – which solutions from the outside can not fix. Our lives’ empty spaces of longing – are really God-shaped spaces. As the Son of God, Jesus knew more than any of us that God is the answer. Only God can make our lives whole. Only God in Christ Jesus brings the peace that passes all understanding. Only God’s ways allow for the completeness of justice to reign in our relationships. Only the Holy Spirit can turn mourning into dancing, and grief into joy.

We are a people centered on this truth, with a capital “T”. The church is a community where we, who struggle with uncertain, unmet longings, can come to find out what to do with them. It’s a family of people who look to Jesus for guidance, when we’re not sure how to handle our temptations. The church is where we can come to be fed, and formed, when we already “get” that God needs to be the center of their lives. When we think that we’ve found another, better answer, the church is our family who can point us back to God. Here we are, with our longings and our temptations. Here we are, with God as our answer, our Truth, amid them all. May God indeed bless us on journey as has been promised. Amen.