

Sermon for Sunday 22 February 2026 – The First Sunday of Lent - Carol Rivett, Reader

Genesis 2.15-17; 3.1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5.12-19; Matthew 4.1-11

Please do sit down. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Has it ever occurred to view how many '40s' there are in the Bible? Mr. Google tells me that there are anything from 145 to 159, depending on which translation you are using. Some of the obvious 40s include the great flood in the story of Noah's Ark, the number of years that the Israelites, led by Moses, were wandering in the wilderness, and the number of days Moses spent on Mount Sinai when he received the Ten Commandments.

And now we have Jesus spending forty days and nights in the wilderness. 40 seems to be quite a significant number, often symbolising trial or hardship. We hear that Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit immediately after his baptism. This was something that Jesus had to undertake before he began his earthly ministry, a time of prayer and contemplation around his ministry here on Earth. It is worth noting that Jesus had been fasting for 40 days before these temptations, at a period when his resistance must have been at its lowest ebb. He must have been famished and absolutely exhausted. The tempter, Satan, offers Jesus three temptations in all.

The first was the offer of bread to assuage his hunger. Jesus's reply was to quote scripture back at Satan, a quotation that comes from the Book of Deuteronomy. Physical bread would sustain the body, but spiritual food is necessary for its holistic well-being.

The second temptation was to be a test of God. If Jesus were to jump from the pinnacle of the temple, a building that we read later in the Bible that Jesus had issues with because he felt it was not doing its duty properly towards the work of his Father, surely God would send angels to prevent Jesus from coming to any harm. This time, Satan used a quote from Psalm 91 to justify his challenge. I expect he thought he was being clever by quoting scripture, just as Jesus had done. But Jesus once again had a reply. He quoted again from Deuteronomy, We know that we can put our trust in God. We know that he will take care of us as he's best for us as long as we trust in him and keep his Commandments. To deliberately put God to the test, asking him to prove his trustworthiness without good reason is a sin in itself. God loves us and understands what it is like to be human and to be tempted.

The third temptation concerned power and identity. Satan offered Jesus all the Kingdoms of the world with all of their glory, if only Jesus would bow down and worship him. That was certainly not going to happen. Jesus returned to Deuteronomy, reminding Satan that the only one to be

worshipped and obeyed was God. Once Jesus had been tempted three times and had resisted them all, he was cared for by angels.

Satan, the devil, the tempter, appeared to Adam and Eve, just as he had done to Jesus and offered temptation. It is thought that Satan had once been a high-ranking angel named Lucifer, and that because he had rebelled against God, he had been expelled from God's realm. It seems that he had once been part of God's creation, and so was originally good, as was all of God's creation. Jesus had resisted temptation, which Adam and Eve had been unable to do in the garden of Eden. It does not take much imagination to realise that this serpent was actually a manifestation of Satan. Jesus demonstrated his obedience to the will of God over immediate physical satisfaction. Adam and Eve were convinced easily that it would be perfectly all right to eat from the fruit of the tree of knowledge, despite God's specific instructions not to do this very thing. And please note, nowhere in the story does it say that this fruit was an apple.

Jesus, in human form like Adam and Eve, was tempted three different ways. And yet resisted each one by using God's own instructions, therefore remaining without sin. By undergoing these temptations, Jesus was able to establish his spiritual authority before he officially began his public ministry. Satan's sin was to rebel against God, and it became his fate to subject all of God's creation, mankind, to do the same.

When Adam and Eve hid from God in the garden of Eden, God knew full well that his instruction had been disobeyed. How else could they have known that they were naked and be ashamed. God gave both the serpent and Adam and Eve a right royal telling off. Humans now knew the difference between good and evil, and they could have possibly eaten more of the fruit and become more like God himself. So they were evicted from the Garden of Eden because of this. They could no longer be trusted. We are not told where they went, but we are told from that time forward, the Garden of Eden was guarded to prevent anyone else from finding their way into it and accessing that forbidden tree.

Satan has three ways of attack: by deception, by distraction, and by discouragement. Satan had sinned in eternity, which was irredeemable. Adam and Eve sinned in time. And because Jesus, as we've just song in the hymn, 'The second Adam to the fight', was also tempted and remained without sin right up until the time of his death, he became the means of our own salvation from sin, in time. Temptation can be found absolutely everywhere. The devil has very many guises in modern life. I'm sure that you don't need me to list any examples or we'd be here all day. In Paul's letter to the Romans, he says that although many people died because of Adam's sin, many more have had the grace of God and the gift of salvation due to the grace of one man in the form of Jesus Christ on Earth. We can be deceived, distracted, and discouraged every day. There was only one man who could resist all temptation, and that was Jesus himself.

To combat the three Ds of Satan, we need the three Cs of salvation: conviction, confession, and conversion. We need to be aware of when and where temptation lurks, and to trust in God to see us through it. This request forms part of the Lord's Prayer. And now we also have a New Testament, a new covenant, and a quotation where Jesus used those from the Old Testament. In the first letter of John, it is written, If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Jesus, that second Adam, took the punishment that should have been ours because of that sin committed by the first Adam. To make a difference is good spiritual discipline, and it is good to extend these adjustments to our lives beyond Lent. It is good to reshape not only our own lives, but those of our families, the community, and the world beyond. Current patterns of Lenten observance vary. While some folks still give up something that they enjoy, food stuffs or internet access during Lent, others undertake to do something extra as part of their reflection, prayer or penitence.

It is important not to view Lent as a period of negativity. Rather, we should use it in a positive way. Whatever you have chosen as your Lent discipline, I pray that you will be given the strength to see it through and that it may become a positive continuation for you in your journey of faith. Amen.