

First Sunday in Lent
Sermon text: Deuteronomy 26:1-11
Related text: Luke 4:1-13
Date preached: February 21, 2010

Lord of all faithfulness, lead us into a new way of thinking that places you above all else in our lives. In Jesus name. Amen.

Did you ever stop to wonder why Jesus taught us to pray, “lead us not into temptation?” Do we believe that God leads us into temptation? Perhaps there are some who do. When something goes wrong in our lives it may be easier to point a finger of blame and who best to point it at than God.

If I blame God then no one’s feelings get hurt. Some will blame hardships upon a faulty social system or government agency. Still some may blame a poor childhood for their less than acceptable behavior as an adult.

Yet if we look to Luther’s explanation of this petition from the Lord’s Prayer we will find an awkward answer. What does this petition mean?

“It is true that God tempts no one, but we ask in this prayer that God would preserve and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other

great and shameful sins, and that, although we may be attacked by them, we may finally prevail and gain the victory.”

Ah, the devil. There's where the blame goes. The devil is the one that makes me curse at the driver who cuts us off at the intersection. Ah, the devil is the one who made me eat more than I should. Ah, the devil is the one who says in that convincing voice the more you have the greater your security. Yet even then, the awkward answer still remains. The one to blame is the person we see in the mirror looking back at us.

The devil is the one who opens the door for us and makes it attractive to walk through. The room we enter then is the room where it is all about me. Go on in, you'll be the life of the party, the star of the show, the center of attention. Except we find this room is an illusion.

Yes, the devil has tricked us by playing on our desires. Instead of being satisfied we crave for more and not only more but on our own terms. The sin is ours. Me first thinking isolates us from God. The good news though is that while we have all succumb to the disease me-first-itis, Jesus doesn't.

Jesus is certainly tempted to think about himself first. You're hungry says the devil, use your power as the son of God to feed yourself. Follow me says the devil, I'll give you the world. Prove yourself says the devil.

Yet in all these ways Jesus points out that it isn't about him. He has come to do the will of God. He has come to accomplish more than the miracles of turning water into wine, of cleansing lepers, and feeding 5,000. Jesus has come to put to death our me-first thinking.

Jesus accomplishes this by doing the will of the Father, even to the point of dying on a cross. Jesus death imparts mercy. Mercy is an action done upon us and upon all for whom Christ died. This merciful act reorients us into a new life. For the change to happen in us we must be linked to Jesus death. We must die with him for only in so doing may we be raised with him.

This is God's work on us. With Jesus death and resurrection we have the hope of everlasting life. With that hope we are also made a new creation. As a new creation we are given an opportunity for a renewed thinking that is not "me first" but "God first".

God first thinking is the living out of what we already believe. “I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.” Hand in hand with making this statement of faith, God first thinking calls us to give thanks to God our Father, who has created all things.

God first thinking calls us to a life of prayer. Thank you God for my eyes have opened to see a new day. Throughout the day opportunities for giving thanks in prayer abound.

God first thinking, a life of prayer and thanksgiving, also leads us to give as a loving response to what God has given us.

That is what is lifted up in our text from Deuteronomy. Before you do anything with your harvest return the first fruit to the Lord. Before you spend anything from your paycheck, return the first fruit of your labor to the Lord.

God first thinking acknowledges that we are in a trusting relationship with God. God continues to provide our every need. God calls us His, loves us through our most unlovable moments and brings us back into a living relationship that has no end.