

First Sunday in Lent  
Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7, Psalm 32, Matthew 4:1-11  
David H. Teschner  
March 9, 2014

In a Lenten message from our Presiding Bishop, Katherine Jefferts-Schori, she wrote that the word “Lent” means “lengthen” as the spring approaches and the daylight hours steadily increase. While the season of Lent in the early church was a time of preparation primarily for those to be baptized on Easter, soon all the faithful prepared together to show solidarity with the new initiates. Lent became, according to Jefferts-Schori, a time when present and future Christians together learned more about and practiced the fundamental disciplines of prayer and study and fasting and giving alms or sharing their resources.

Especially in the northern hemisphere, she writes, lengthening days were also a time of famine and hunger when many people’s food stores were used up, and the spring crop had not yet arrived. Christians showed solidarity with their hungry neighbors by pooling together limited food stocks so everyone got enough.

This first Sunday in Lent is also Episcopal Relief and Development Sunday. Episcopal Relief and Development, as many of you know, is our national church charity. Inside the brochure you have, it says,

*In collaboration with Anglican and ecumenical partners in over 40 countries, we work with 3 million people annually through programs in four core areas:*

*Alleviating Hunger and Improving the Food Supply*

*Promoting Health and Fighting Disease*

*Creating Economic Opportunities and Strengthening Communities*

*Responding to Disasters and Rebuilding Communities*

In addition to ongoing development work around the globe, in the last year, ERD responded to:

the flooding in Colorado;

the bombing during the Boston marathon;

the tsunami in the Philippines;  
the civil war in South Sudan;  
and the Syrian refugee crisis, to name a few.

I thought we as a church might want to focus our giving at this time to be in solidarity with the Syrian refugees, recently estimated at 2 million and climbing. You may put some cash in the envelope you have or take it home and write a larger check and send it yourself. If you do, indicate where you want your gift directed and that you are a member of Christ and Grace Church in the Diocese of Southern Virginia.

If you are thinking about making ERD one of your ongoing charities and giving regularly, you need to know that 90 cents of every dollar contributed goes directly to relief or development aid, and you will be helping with nearly every major crisis we read about in the papers daily.

Three times in the last 20 years Virginians have received ERD assistance, and once it was right here in Petersburg after the tornado in 1993.

In our Ash Wednesday gospel, Jesus said that giving without fanfare would be rewarded by our Father in heaven. I can assure you, you will feel great about donating to ERD knowing you are helping God's people on nearly every continent in their time of greatest need.

Shifting gears then, I'd like to talk now a little about temptation. As we heard, Adam and Eve were tempted by that crafty serpent, and Jesus was tempted by the scripture-quoting devil. Adam and Eve crashed and burned while Jesus sent the devil scurrying off with his tail between his metaphorical legs.

I believe that Adam and Eve represent every man and every woman. Their failure is our failure as well. We can't resist wanting more. One of our many cultural messages is, "We can have it all." Limitations are only for those who don't believe in their ability to overcome obstacles and seek greatness. When Sir Edmond Hillary was asked why he climbed Mt. Everest, he said, "Because it was there." As soon as we tell a child not to touch something, his or her finger automatically

begins to reach toward the forbidden object. Curiosity killed the cat. If anyone says you can't, we immediately try to rise to the challenge.

Temptation in and of itself is not a bad thing. In fact, in other parts of the Bible, like here, God allows temptation to make his people strong. Forty years in the wilderness finally did it for the Israelites. God allowed Job to be tempted by Satan quite rigorously. Billy Graham once said, "Everyone meets temptations, but some folks entertain them."

Adam and Eve's fatal mistake was to engage the serpent in conversation. They entertain his suggestion about eating the forbidden fruit. Have you ever thought about doing something and your immediate response was no, but as you thought more about it, your mind starting devising a rationale for doing it. We entertain temptations or bad ideas when we start justifying why it may not be such a bad idea after all. Usually some strong desire in us is driving the inner conversation.

Notice Jesus had an immediate rebuttal for the devil with every temptation and finally a sharp rebuke, "Away with you, Satan!" Jesus never for a minute entertained the devil's ingeniously devised schemes for his future ministry. Jesus was tempted to seek popularity, fame, fortune and power, and he flatly refused them all for a servant approach to ministry.

Thomas a Kempis, in his 15<sup>th</sup> century classic devotional, The Imitation of Christ, wrote, "The devil is continuously tempting thee to seek high things, to go after honors."

Our former U. S. Surgeon General, the late C. Everett Koop, played football at Dartmouth College. The coach who had formerly been at West Point told Koop that as a freshman he had the talent to become a great running back. Overnight Koop became a Big Man on Campus, and he writes in his autobiography, "And I had four years to enjoy it."

A few days later he was hit hard in practice and suffered double vision as a result. When it persisted, he saw an eye doctor at the college medical center who asked him what he was studying. Koop said pre-med. The doctor told him that his condition was serious and football could jeopardize a career in medicine. Koop

was torn. Could he give up the glamour of football stardom to become a doctor? He reluctantly left football. His coach called him a coward, and his new friends turned their backs on him from that day forward.

Koop would later write of his decision, "Giving up football was one of the hardest and wisest choices I made at Dartmouth. Not only had I acted wisely to save my surgical ambitions, but I also moved into a different social world, choosing a quieter path that would bring me close friendships with other pre-med students."

It's hard to know how many lives Dr. Koop saved during his career, but we know it was many. You may remember an important issue for him as Surgeon General was to highlight the dangers of tobacco use.

If I had been in Koop's shoes back at Dartmouth, I can imagine I may have rationalized a way to do both – football now and medicine later.

We face temptations every day. May we quickly choose the way of service above self-promotion. AMEN.